NEW **UNEARTH THE ORIGINS OF THE SLAVE WHO FORGED AN EMPIRE**

Genghis Khan
AND THE
MONGOL EMPIRE

INSIDE
THE KHAN'S DOGS OF WAR

From the makers of ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Digital Edition

FOURTH EDITION

INVENTION & INVASION ✦ WEAPONS & WARFARE ✦ MASTERS OF ASIA

Who dares to stand before The Great Khan?

Prepare to enter the empire of Genghis Khan, a sprawling mass of conquered lands, ruined cities and ruthless generals, a world in which only the brave will survive. Turn the page to begin a journey that will take you from the wind-blown steppes of the Far East to the heart of Europe, an adventure in which you will meet the nomadic warriors who brought mighty kingdoms to their knees, walk alongside explorers who traversed continents and marvel at the wonders of Mongol ingenuity. You'd better hurry. The khan waits for no one.

Images: Alamy

FUTURE

Genghis Khan AND THE MONGOL EMPIRE

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Bookazine Editorial
Editor **Charles Ginger**
Designer **Thomas Parrett**
Compiled by **Jessica Leggett & Briony Duguid**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**

Magazine Editorial
Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
Designer **Kym Winters**
Editorial Director **Tim Williamson**
Senior Art Editor **Duncan Crook**

Contributors
Matt Lochrie, Matt Smith

Cover images
Shutterstock, Getty Images, Alamy, Adrian Mann, Joe Cummings
All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely,**
Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

All About History Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire Fourth Edition (AHB4857)
© 2022 Future Publishing Limited

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this bookazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

All contents © 2022 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

FUTURE
Connectors.
Creators.
Experience
Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Part of the
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
bookazine series

Widely Recycled

ipso. For press freedom with responsibility

Contents

The rise of Genghis Khan

10 EARLY LIFE OF GENGHIS

16 WOMEN OF THE EMPIRE

18 35 FACTS ABOUT GENGHIS KHAN

Forging an empire

30 THE MILITARY MIGHT OF THE MONGOLS

40 KEY COMMANDERS

44 THE CONQUEST OF CHINA

54 SIX MONGOL SACKINGS

56 CRUSHING KHWAREZMIA

62 INVADING EASTERN EUROPE

68 THE BATTLE OF MOHI

74 SIEGE OF BAGHDAD

76 THE BATTLE OF AIN JALUT

82 JAPAN

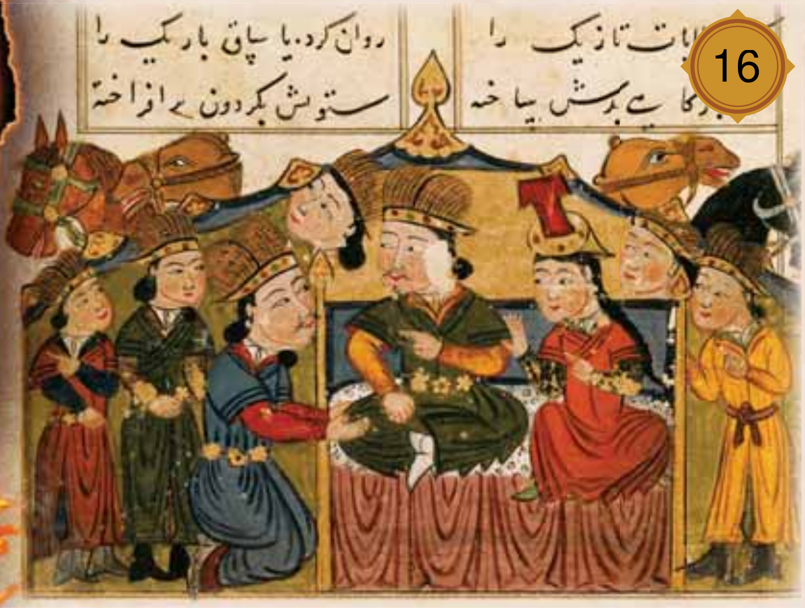
Kublai, culture & cooking

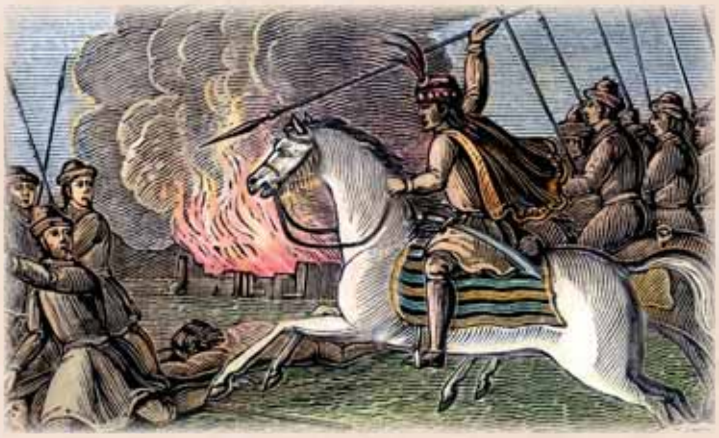
86 WRATH OF THE KHANS
91 A MONGOL ARTEFACT
92 THE ADVENTURES OF MARCO POLO
102 INSIDE A MONGOL GER
104 FEEDING AN ARMY

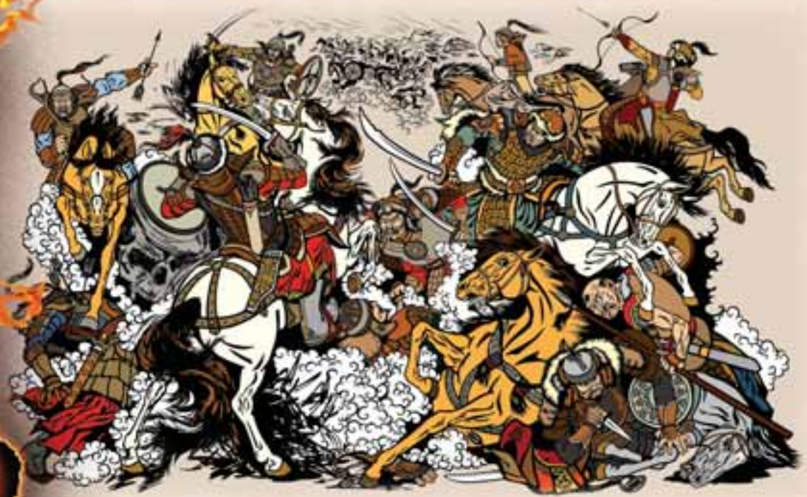
Rebellion & resurgence

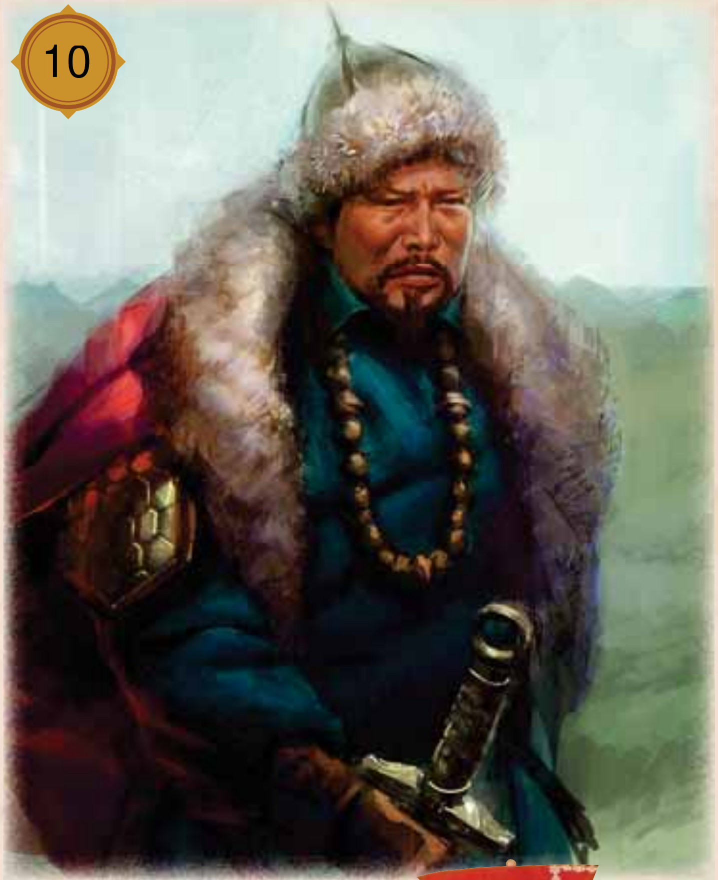
108 DIVISION OF THE EMPIRE
112 THE RED TURBAN REBELLION
118 TAMERLANE
126 LEGACY OF THE EMPIRE
130 THE EMPIRE BY NUMBERS

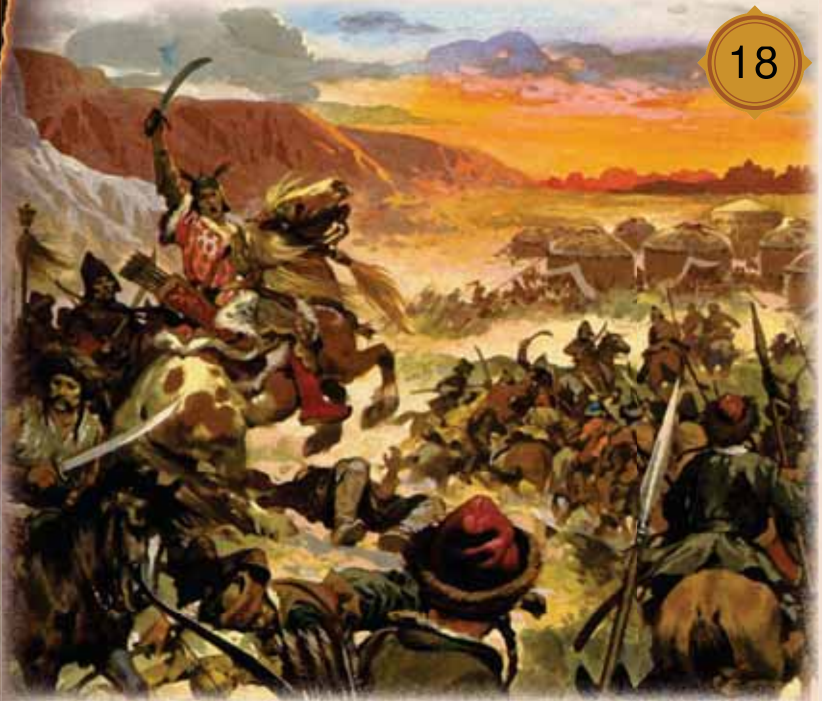
Images: Alamy (map, p30, p62, p76); Getty Images (yellow-shirted man on horse, p44); Shutterstock (p10); Met Museum CC0 1.0 (p91); Chinneeb CC BY-SA 3.0 (p40)

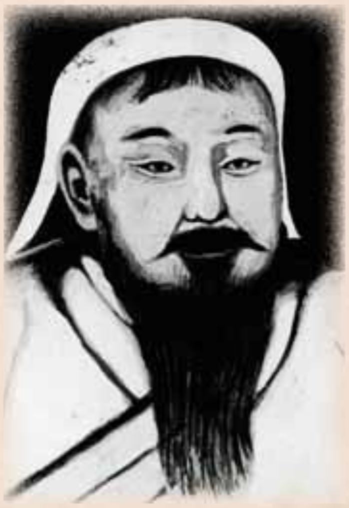

16

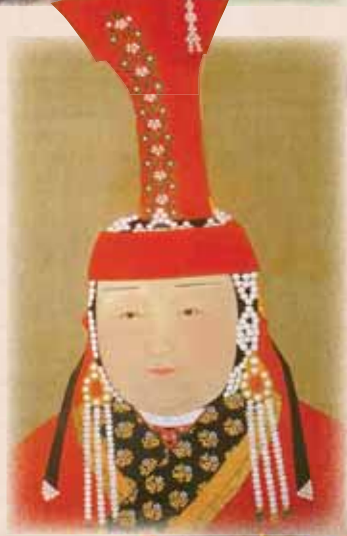





10


18





The rise of GENGHIS KHAN

10 EARLY LIFE OF GENGHIS

Uncover the origins of a slave boy who would bring the world to its knees

16 WOMEN OF THE EMPIRE

Historian and author Anne F. Broadridge on the women of the Mongol Empire

18 35 FACTS ABOUT GENGHIS KHAN

Everything you ever wanted to know about the Mongol's supreme leader

Images: Alamy (warrior on white horse, Genghis statue); Getty Images (p16, black&white drawing); Shutterstock (p10, battle illustration); Look & Learn (p18, horse-riding group)

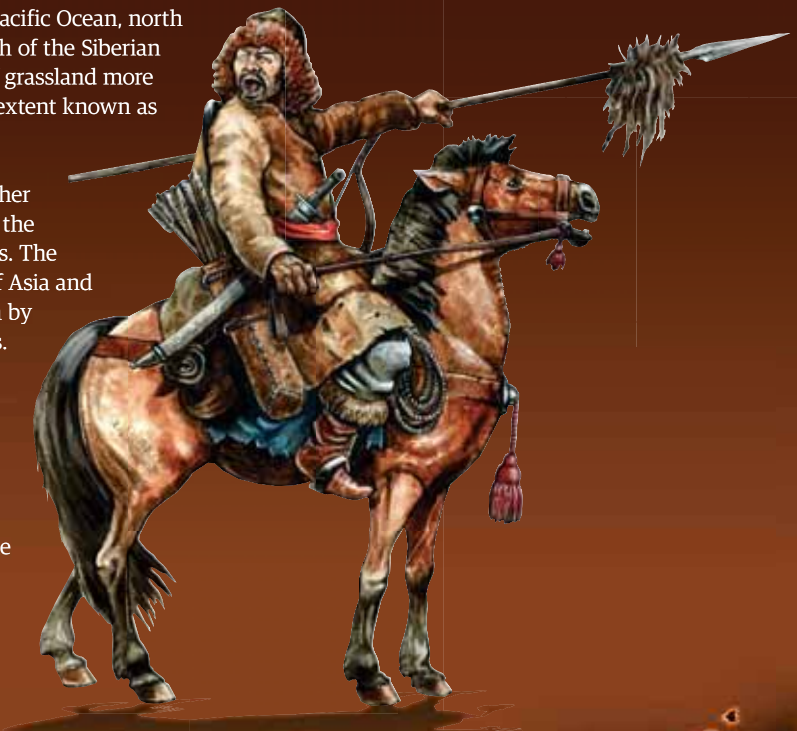
The early life of GENGHIS KHAN

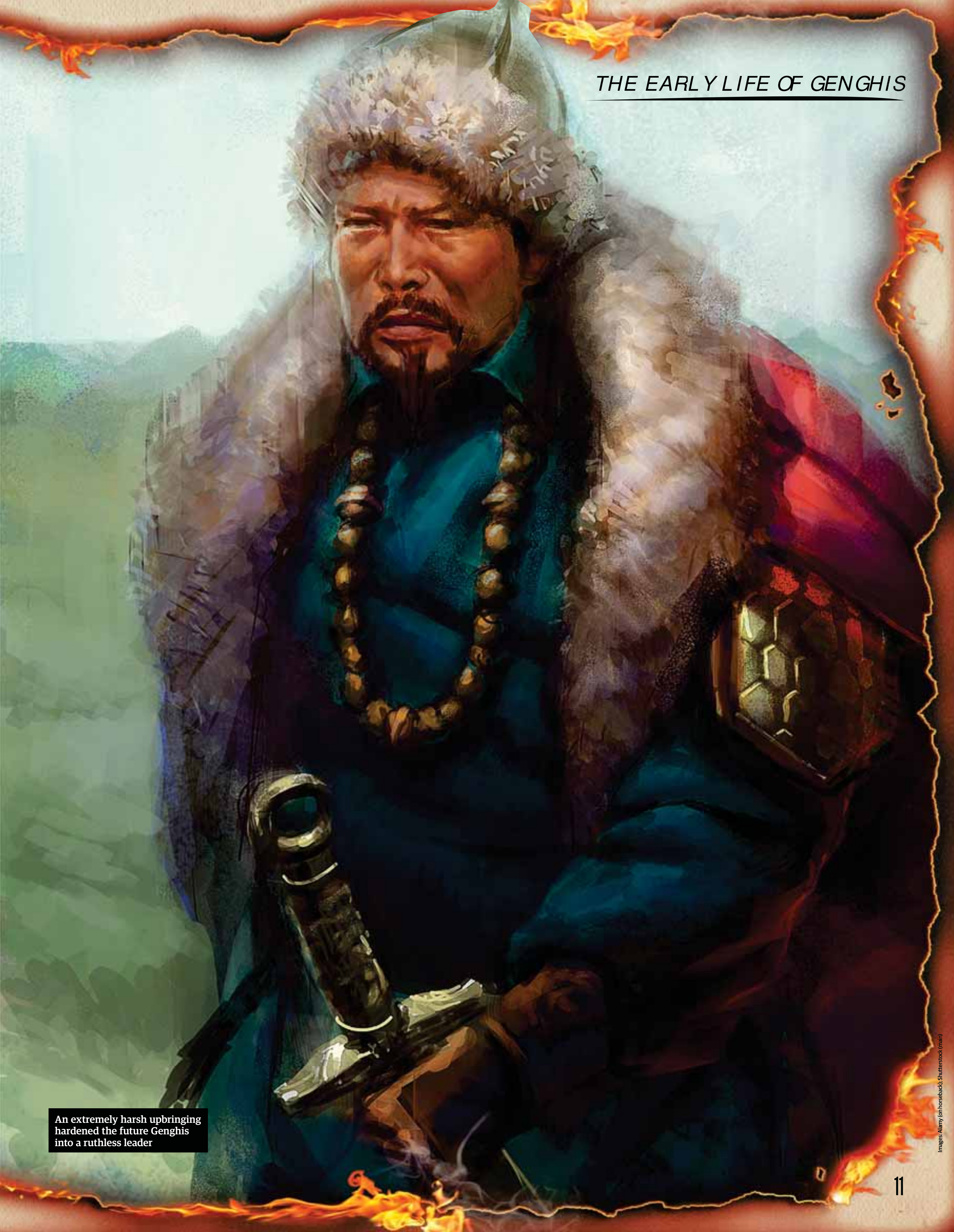
FROM THE OBSCURITY OF THE STEPPES EMERGED A MAN WHO WOULD TAKE ON THE WORLD

Written by Derek Wilson

From the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean, north of the Himalayas and south of the Siberian forest, there lies an area of grassland more than 8,000 kilometres in extent known as the Eurasian Steppe.

For millennia its sheer vastness presented a barrier to trade and other forms of communication between the peoples who lived around its edges. The settled, town-based civilisations of Asia and Europe developed communication by seaways and riverain watercourses. For the steppe-dwellers (divided into Turkic and Mongol racial types) life was very different. Instead of building ever-more elaborate cities and towns as administrative, commercial and defensive centres, the people of the steppes dwelt in tents and lived a mobile life, forever moving with their cattle and horses in search of the best grazing grounds.





An extremely harsh upbringing hardened the future Genghis into a ruthless leader

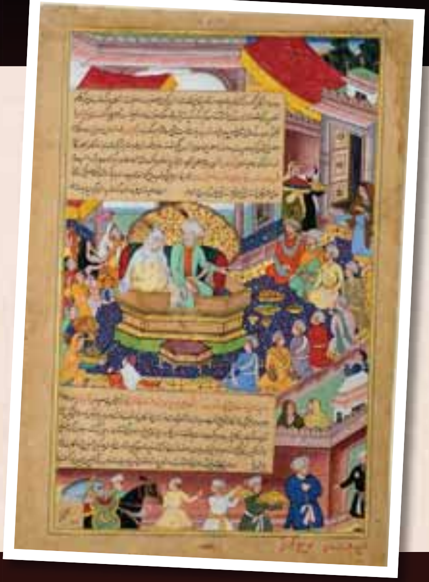
Images: Alamy (on horseback); Shutterstock (main)

Börte: Genghis Khan's empress

THE WOMAN BEHIND TEMÜJIN'S RISE TO POWER

Börte (c.1151–1230), Temüjin's first and most highly prized wife, proved to be an essential support throughout her husband's lifetime. The stories about her portray her as both beautiful and wise. Like all Mongol chiefs, Temüjin practised polygamy, but, according to legend, Börte was the only wife whose advice he sought and frequently followed. When he went on campaign he took other wives to attend to his physical needs. He left his youngest brother, Temüge, to oversee central government, but Börte was always assigned to accompany and assist him.

Like other royal wives, Börte maintained her own establishment and was allotted vast tracts of land and people to support her state, but no one was richer than Börte, who was gifted extensive Tatar territory. When Temüjin was acknowledged as the Mongol leader who would forever after be known as Genghis Khan in 1206, Börte was crowned as his 'empress'. However, she was unable to ensure the succession of her eldest son, Jochi, because of the lingering doubt that Temüjin wasn't the boy's father. Thus it was that her third son, Ögedei, was elected as khan.



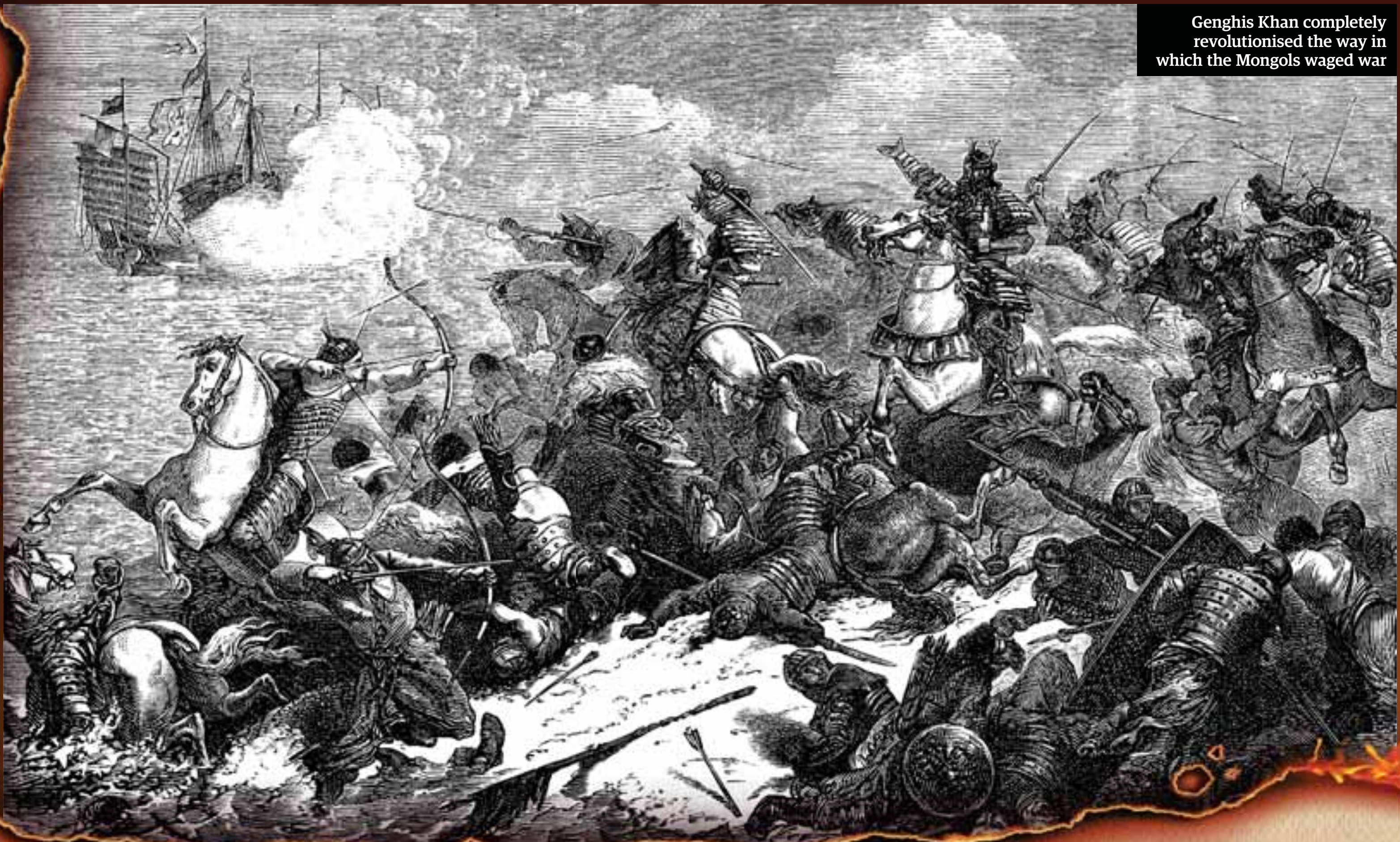
Tribes were frequently in competition with each other and survived by means of ever-changing alliances dictated by the need for defence or hostility.

These warrior societies developed awesome skills as fighters and fast-moving horsemen. They had little interest in cultivating what are generally considered as the 'arts of peace', based on written laws and social conventions. That is why it is remarkable that from among the Mongols there emerged the greatest land empire builder in history.

Around 1162 a boy called Temüjin was born in northern Mongolia, near what is the current capital Ulaanbaatar. His father Yesugei belonged to the Borjigin clan, one of the more powerful in the region and part of a confederation of which Yesugei was recognised as khan (chief). Temüjin's mother was called Hoelun. She came from the Khongirad tribe and had been snatched away from her previous husband, the chief of the Merkid tribe, by Yesugei, a not uncommon method by which some young Mongol warriors obtained their brides. In the hard, unstable world of the steppes, what the poet Wordsworth called the 'ancient rule' prevailed: 'They should take who have the power and they should keep who can.' In a society in which this was regarded as the norm such behaviour was not considered brutal – it was a fact of life.

When Temüjin reached the age of nine, as was the custom, his marriage was arranged. As the eldest son of a chief he was not free to choose his own spouse (or even to go on a raid looking for one). The matter was of dynastic importance and therefore arranged between clan chiefs. In this case Yesugei looked to his wife's relatives, the Khongirads, and agreed that Temüjin would marry Börte, their chief's daughter. Accordingly, the boy was taken to live with Börte's people so that they might be brought up together until they reached puberty and could be joined in wedlock.

On his way home Yesugei accepted hospitality from a Tatar chief, who then poisoned him at a feast. Yesugei died days later. This tragedy could not have occurred at a worse time for the chief's family. Not only were Yesugei's people struggling for survival at a time of famine, the old chief's family was banished by their fellow clan members, whose new leader refused to entertain the notion



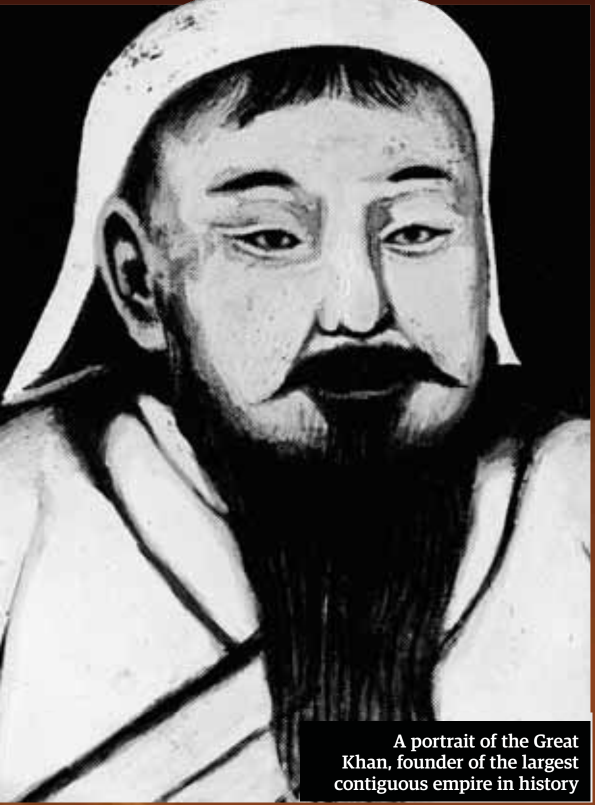
Genghis Khan completely revolutionised the way in which the Mongols waged war

> "When Temüjin reached the age of nine his marriage was arranged"

of a nine-year-old Temüjin replacing his diseased father as ruler.

Abandoned and exposed to the ravages of the steppe, Temüjin's family somehow managed to scratch out a living by foraging for wild fruit and hunting anything they could find. However, it wasn't long before Behter, Temüjin's older half-brother, began to deny Hoelun and her children the resources upon which they had become totally reliant. This inevitably caused resentment, which festered until Temüjin and his brother Qasar determined to murder Behter. Following him into the wilderness during a hunting expedition, the siblings seized the chance to dispatch him, a crime for which Hoelun lambasted them.

Further hardship was to come at the age of 15 when Temüjin was captured during a raid by the Tayichuid clan and forced into slavery. Having spent six years struggling to survive, the future leader of the Mongols now faced the prospect of perishing at the hands of his new tormentors. Yet while lesser souls would have been broken, Temüjin refused to admit defeat, instead working to befriend one of his captors, a man named



A portrait of the Great Khan, founder of the largest contiguous empire in history

UNITING THE TRIBES

Creating the nucleus of the Mongol Empire involved the absorption or annihilation of several neighbouring tribal confederations. Between 1200 and 1203 Temüjin built a Mongol conglomerate as a result of various conflicts. He was not working to a programme of conquest, picking off his enemies one-by-one; the situation was more fluid – today's friend might be tomorrow's foe.

Merkits

There had been bad blood between Temüjin's people and the Merkits since before Temüjin was born. Enmity continued for more than 20 years and was certainly fanned into a blaze when his father Yesugei abducted Hoelun, the wife of a Merkit chief. A generation later Merkit raiders carried off Börte, Temüjin's wife. In the rival assault on the Merkits' encampment Temüjin had the support of the Keraites, then the most powerful of the Mongol tribes. The Merkits ceased to be a significant force following their defeat and by 1200 had been absorbed by other tribes.

Keraites (Khereids)

Once the dominant group of the eastern steppes, the Keraites were weakened by internal fighting in the late 12th century. Toghrul, the reigning khan, gained power by murdering his brothers. He was a blood brother of Yesugei and a supporter of Temüjin, but he became involved in Jamukha's (a blood brother of Temüjin's) rebellion. He paid for supporting the losing side by being overthrown in 1200.

Tatars

These were a widespread people of Mongol and Turkic origin divided into several powerful tribes (khanates). They were a formidable barrier to Temüjin's expansion, and he had a personal reason to hate them – it was a Tatar chief who had poisoned his father. In 1202 Temüjin marched east, defeated the Tatars, carried out a massive slaughter of male captives and married their women to his own troops, taking two Tatar wives for himself.

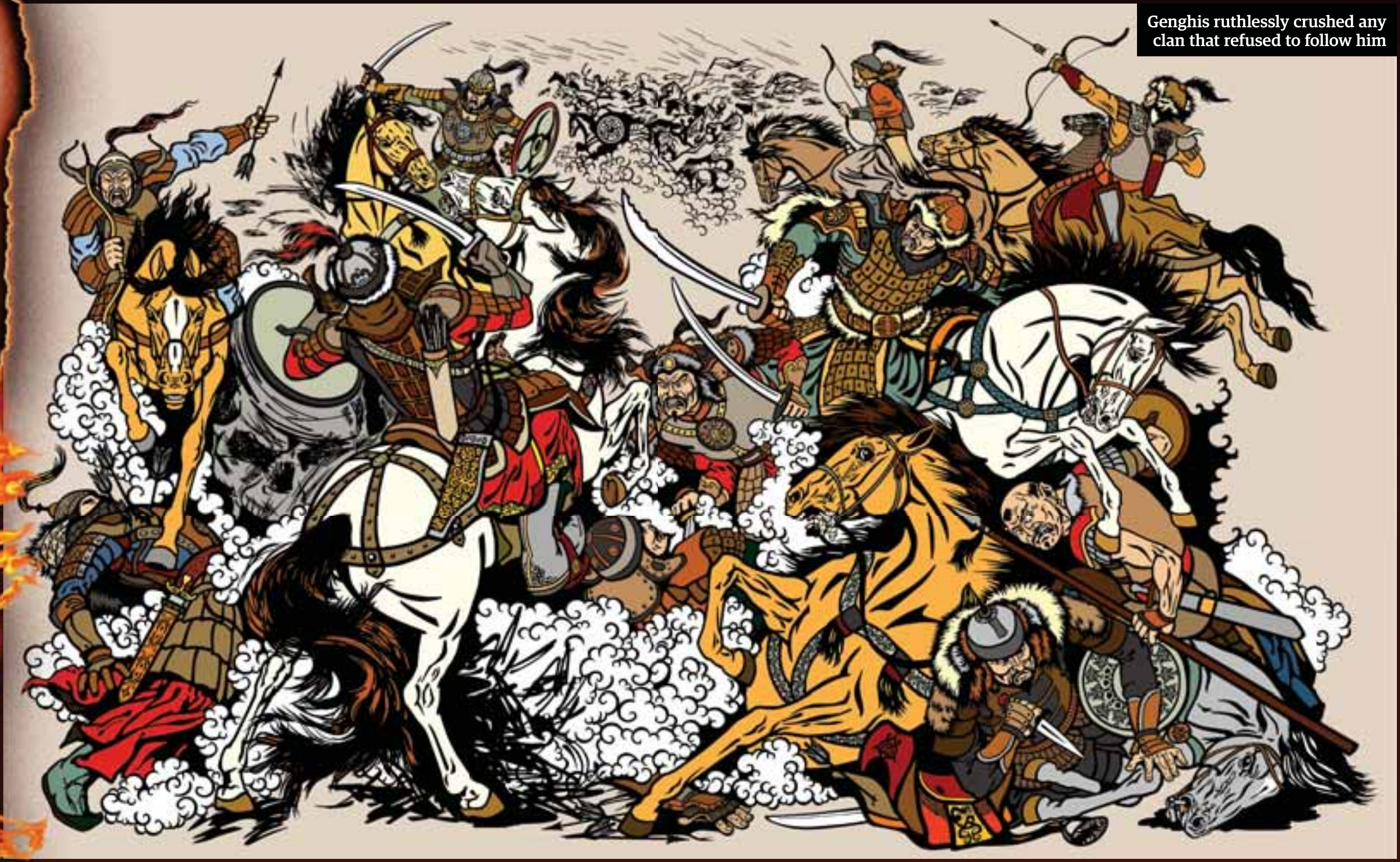
Khamag Mongol

This was the confederation to which Temüjin's people belonged. Until Temüjin came to power it was weak and poorly organised. When his erstwhile friend Jamukha made a bid for supreme rule of the Khamag Mongol the result was the Battle of the Thirteen Sides, which established Temüjin's control of the Khamag Mongol in 1201. It was during this battle that Temüjin sustained an arrow wound to the neck.

Naimans

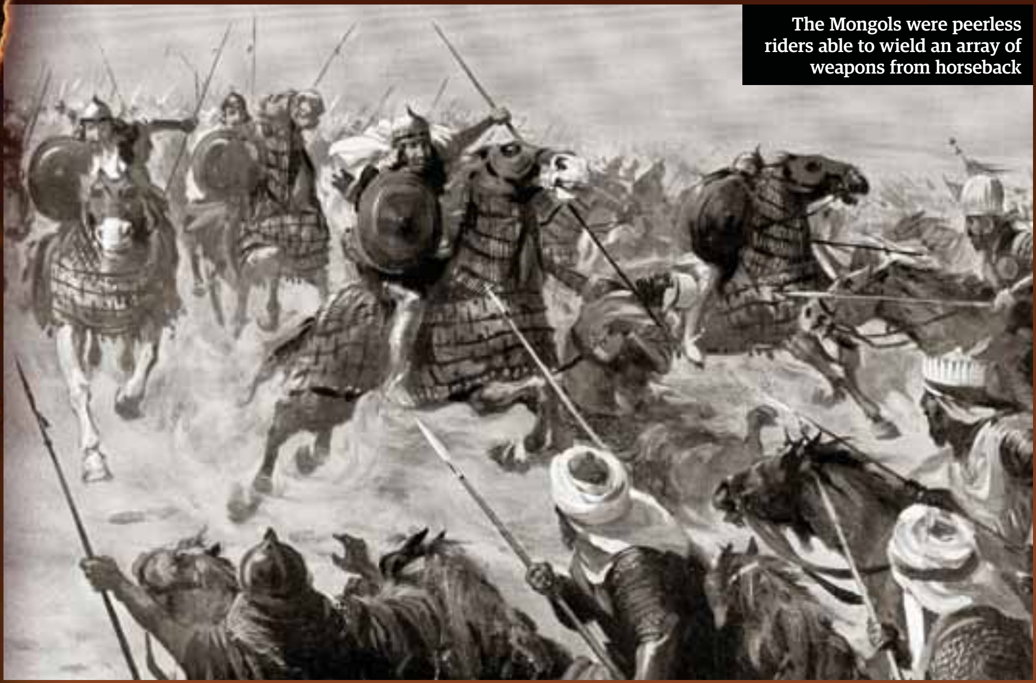
Temüjin encountered the Naimans, a people of the mountains and the steppe, as he expanded his empire westwards into modern-day Kazakhstan. After a final battle in 1203, in which the Naiman khan, Byirugh, was killed, many Naimans chose to migrate into what is today northeastern China.

Images: Getty Images (war, portrait)



Genghis ruthlessly crushed any clan that refused to follow him

> "It was the long-running, bitter feud with the Merkits that proved to be the catalyst for Temüjin's empire building"



The Mongols were peerless riders able to wield an array of weapons from horseback

Sorqan-Shira, who in turn helped him to escape. This act of mercy would be repaid years later when Temüjin secured his position as Genghis Khan and promoted Sorqan-Shira's son Chilaun (whose name means 'rocky' in Mongol) to the role of general. He would come to be known as one of the Great Khan's four valiant warriors.

His freedom regained, Temüjin finally married Börte in 1178 and brought her to live with his family. However, not long afterwards the newlyweds were torn apart. Just as Yesugei had abducted the wife of a Merkit chief, so, in 1181, Merkit raiders now carried off Börte. She was held in captivity for eight months while Temüjin plotted his revenge.

Having forged sufficiently strong alliances with a number of other clans, he eventually set off with a large force to rescue his wife. His raid on the Merkit camp was a slaughter that left 300 dead. Yet there was no sign of Börte, who was now pregnant and was being carried off by the fleeing Merkits. Leaving his men to plunder the camp, Temüjin went in pursuit, cutting a bloody path through the terrified Merkits before joyfully reuniting with his young wife.

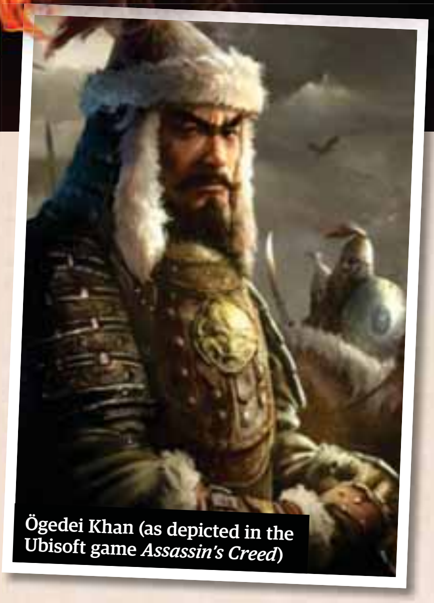
The cunning and bravery that Temüjin displayed in rescuing his wife burnished an already growing reputation among the nomadic peoples of Mongolia. Never one to waste an opportunity, Temüjin slowly began to establish his authority, first of all within his own clan, and then, by degrees, over other clans and groups of neighbouring tribes.

It was the long-running, bitter feud with the Merkits that proved to be the catalyst for Temüjin's empire building. The Merkit peoples comprised three powerful tribes occupying land between the major rivers Selenga and Orkhon (on whose banks the first great Mongolian capital, Karakorum, would be built by Temüjin's son Ögedei).

As well as the wife-stealing incidents that launched the feud, there was another ongoing dispute that particularly niggled Temüjin – the paternity of his eldest son, Jochi. Was he conceived before or during Börte's eight-month sojourn in the Merkit camp? Merkit claims that the boy belonged to them were a persistent affront to Temüjin's honour. For 20 years he lost no opportunity to wage war against them, and he was eventually responsible for their disappearance as a recognisably distinct people.

While Temüjin was fighting rival tribes he also had to face difficulties closer to home. Older members of his family regarded him as an upstart. Yesugai's brothers had hoped to replace him after his death and resented the arrogant presumption of their nephew, who was gathering around himself a loyal cadre of younger men. In a society governed by the unspoken rule 'might is right', any disaffection was contagious. Once-faithful allies could be seduced by the prospect of more power or booty to change sides. Others became resentful of their leader's pioneering methods of military discipline and organisation. The effect of all this on Temüjin was to rely more on his friends and blood brothers. It was these young companions he chose as his lieutenants rather than his own kin.

Using novel tactics that divided his forces into small, manouvrable groups that deployed a flag system to stay in touch during battle, Temüjin gradually eroded the spirit of resistance among the remaining tribes of Mongolia. Mindful to pay due respect to Mongol traditions while simultaneously ripping up the rule book and overhauling the way his people conducted warfare, the man who would be chosen as 'Universal Ruler' would spend the rest of his life carving out an empire on an unprecedented scale. Once a slave, he would come to hold in his hands the fates of millions. In time the world would shake before him.



Ögedei Khan (as depicted in the Ubisoft game *Assassin's Creed*)

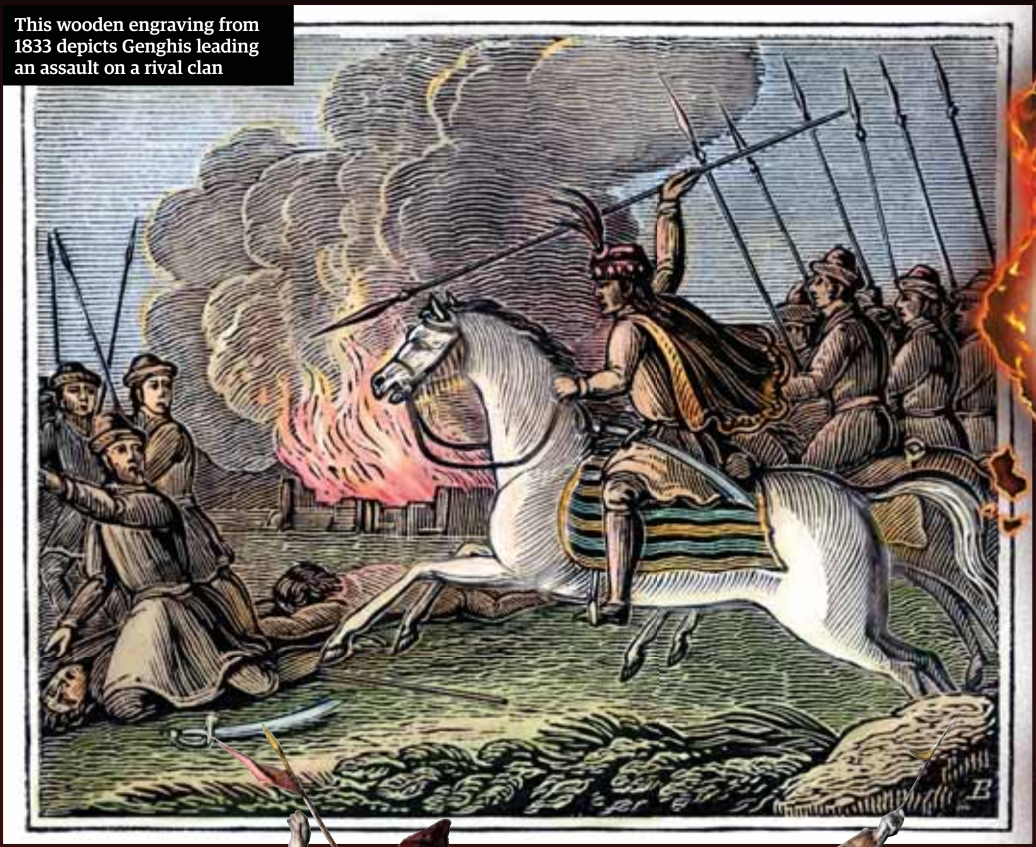
Children of the khan

SECURING HIS LINEAGE WAS NEVER GOING TO BE A PROBLEM FOR GENGHIS

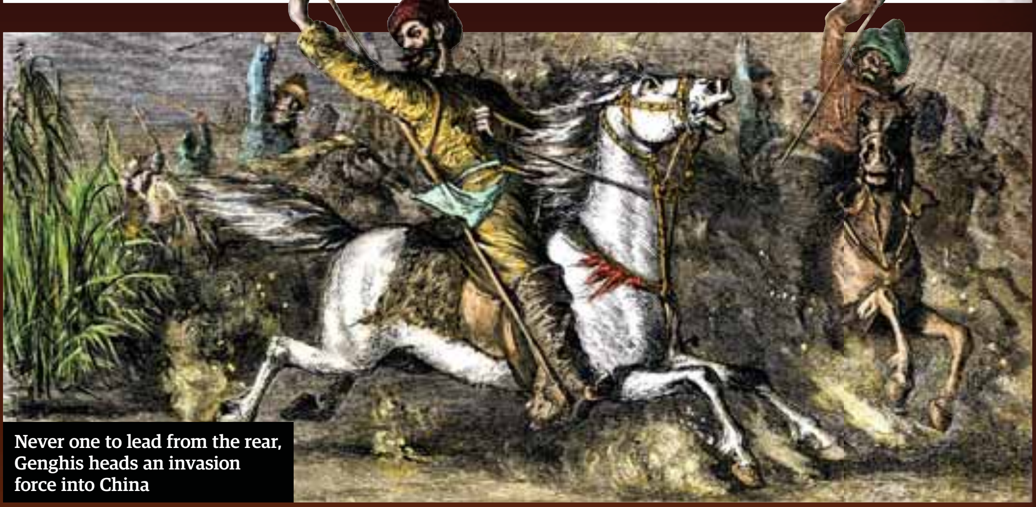
There is no accurate record of the large number of children sired by Genghis Khan. As well as concubines, kept for casual sex, he had numerous wives. Some were acquired for political reasons – princesses married to cement tribal alliances. Some provided the leader with sons to strengthen the family's hold on power. Temüjin appointed some to important military and governmental posts. The more important ones, who built on the foundation laid by their father, were Jochi, Chagatai and Ögedei.

Jochi was the eldest and proved himself an excellent military leader in several campaigns, particularly in the northern border lands. However, the question mark that always hung over his parentage meant that he did not enjoy the full support of his father's people (and, in any case, he predeceased Genghis Khan).

Chagatai, Genghis' second son, refused to serve under Jochi. A fiery and impulsive character, he effectively ruled himself out of the succession. For these and other reasons Genghis nominated Ögedei to succeed him. It proved to be a good choice, as Ögedei was the son who most resembled his father – not in terms of military prowess but as a pragmatic politician who maintained the stability of the Mongol Empire.



This wooden engraving from 1833 depicts Genghis leading an assault on a rival clan



Never one to lead from the rear, Genghis heads an invasion force into China

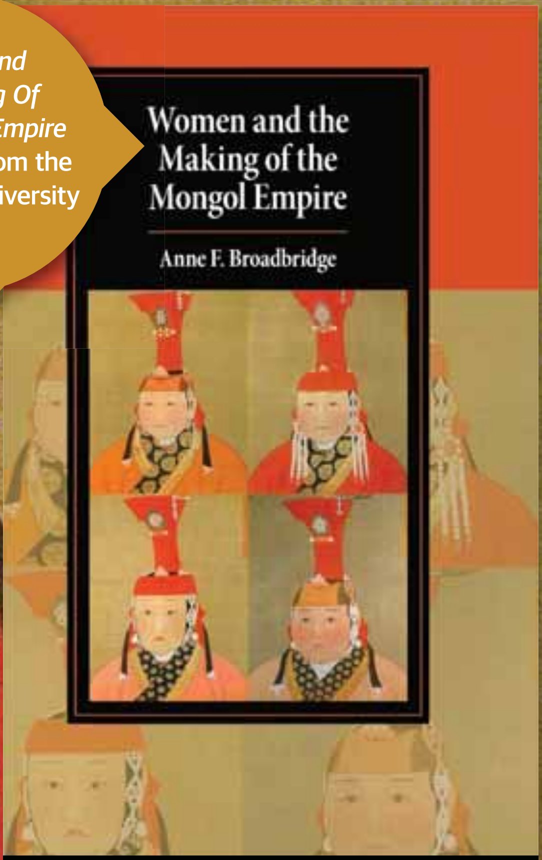
Images: All Alamy except Shutterstock (far top left); Ubisoft (Ögedei)

Q&A with...

ANNE F. BROADBRIDGE

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE RISE OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE

Women And The Making Of The Mongol Empire is available from the Cambridge University Press.



Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire

Anne F. Broadbridge

Professor Broadbridge is an associate professor of history at University of Massachusetts Amherst and an expert in the Mamluk Sultanate, Mongol Empire, Ottoman Empire and Temür, as well as ideology, legitimacy, diplomacy and women in history. She has been nominated three times for the Distinguished Teaching Award and in 2004 received an Outstanding Teacher Award.

Q In your book you look at the important and influential roles women played in Genghis Khan's family and in the Mongol Empire. What were these roles?

A It's critical to understand that in nomadic society, work was organised along gender lines. Since the Mongols were herders with flocks, for example, women tended cattle, men cared for horses and (Bactrian) camels, and women and men together managed sheep and goats. In the moveable camps in which the Mongols lived, men built the round, wood-and-felt homes (gers or yurts) and the ox-wagons for storage and transport, while women managed these gers, wagons and the camp itself, often with a considerable staff.

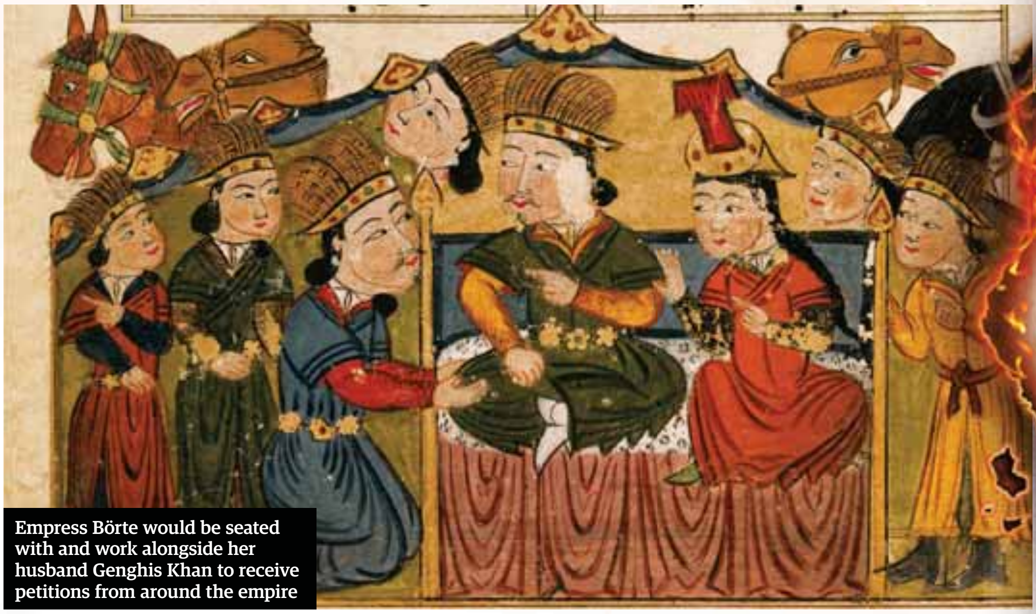
Politically, imperial women networked with other Chinggisids, religious men, bureaucrats, military commanders, vassal rulers and foreign dignitaries. When Chinggis (Genghis) Khan sat on his throne to hold court, his senior wife, Börte, sat on his left on her own throne, and the two received petitioners together. Women also attended the assemblies (*quriltais*) in which military invasions were planned and succession to the throne was determined.

Q What role did women play in the Mongol conquests and expansion of the empire?

A The division of labour by gender meant that women handled the home front (the nomadic camp and flocks), which freed men to specialise in war. Other than making the gers and wagons, men's work was to care for the horses they rode in war; conduct hunting expeditions with hundreds or thousands of warriors to practise the techniques they used in war (communicating, encircling, trapping, shooting); make political alliances with other men to find allies for war, then after all this... go to war. During Chinggis Khan's campaigns, Börte stayed in Mongolia with the imperial camp, but a junior wife accompanied him to run a travelling camp, from which military strikes were made. We can thus say that the Mongols were able to militarise nearly all of their male population because so many other activities were routinely handled by women. No other contemporary society managed anything like this.

Q How would you say women's roles in the empire compare with those of women in other contemporary empires?

A Favourably. In Mongol society, both genders could act with real authority: an imperial woman could be a political actor in her own right and also could hold great management responsibilities. If we contrast Börte with Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204), we see that Eleanor was the wealthiest and most influential women of her century in Western Europe, but she was often hemmed in by the authority of her husbands - Louis VII of France and Henry II of England - even in her own territories of Aquitaine. By contrast, Börte's responsibilities to her camp were greater than Eleanor's, as were her independence and authority.



Empress Börte would be seated with and work alongside her husband Genghis Khan to receive petitions from around the empire

Q What challenges did women face?

A In the lawless years before the empire's rise, women faced abduction, rape and involuntary relocation. If Chinggis Khan's father Yisügei had not kidnapped and forcibly married another man's wife (Genghis' mother Hö'elün), the Mongol Empire might never have come into existence. With Yisügei, Hö'elün bore Chinggis Khan (a title; his name was Temüjin), then three more boys and a girl. If Hö'elün had had those kids with her first husband, how might Mongol history have been different? A generation later, that first husband's family kidnapped Chinggis Khan's wife Börte as revenge. Although Chinggis Khan rescued Börte, one of her nine kids was born shortly after her kidnap, and his paternity was always in question.

Once imperial women enjoyed the relative stability of the empire, their greatest challenge may have been managing incredible wealth and a very heavy workload. The imperial camps could be very large: "Hundreds and thousands of wagons and tents," said one Chinese observer of Börte's camp in 1223. I doubt imperial women got much sleep.

Q You mention in your book that some women rose to significant positions of power. Could you tell us a little about them?

A The best opportunities were for women in the Golden Lineage, meaning both those born into it (Chinggisid princesses) and those who married in (imperial wives). These include Chinggis Khan's mother, Hö'elün, who kept the family going despite years of poverty after her husband was murdered when Chinggis was nine. Later, Chinggis' senior wife, Börte, ran the camp so he could conduct his campaigns, advised him politically and provided the nine children who established their dynasty.

Thereafter, two of Chinggis Khan's daughters-in-law influenced the empire tremendously, although not in good ways. Töregene was the widow of Chinggis Khan's son and heir, Ögedei. She single-handedly opposed her dead husband's will and wrested the throne out of the hands of her grandson and into those of her son, Great Khan Güyük. Thereafter, another imperial widow, Sorqoqtani, conspired with her nephew to make one of her sons into the Great Khan and helped bloodily purge two branches of the family.

Q It's clear from your work that women were integral to the Mongol Empire, so why have they seemingly been lost from the history of the empire?

A They have always been there, but historians didn't see them, in part because they were not asking the right questions. The story of Temüjin-turned-Chinggis Khan is a rags-to-riches tale, and the conquests also provide a thrilling triumphal narrative that captures attention. Plus, older historians (almost exclusively men) were trained by (other) men to focus on politics and the military, which were male-dominated topics. But as a woman myself, I learned the triumphal narrative, then began to wonder what women were doing while men were conquering. I had heard the names of the women I've mentioned, but not much more. Once I started looking into their activities, I discovered that women were making major, systematic contributions to the conquests and the empire. The answers to these (and other questions) became the book.

Images: Getty Images (Empress Börte)

35 FACTS ABOUT Genghis

EMPIRE BUILDER, CONQUEROR AND WARLORD, DISCOVER 35 FACTS ABOUT THE MAN WHO DECIMATED ENTIRE CIVILISATIONS AND ESTABLISHED A NEW WORLD ORDER

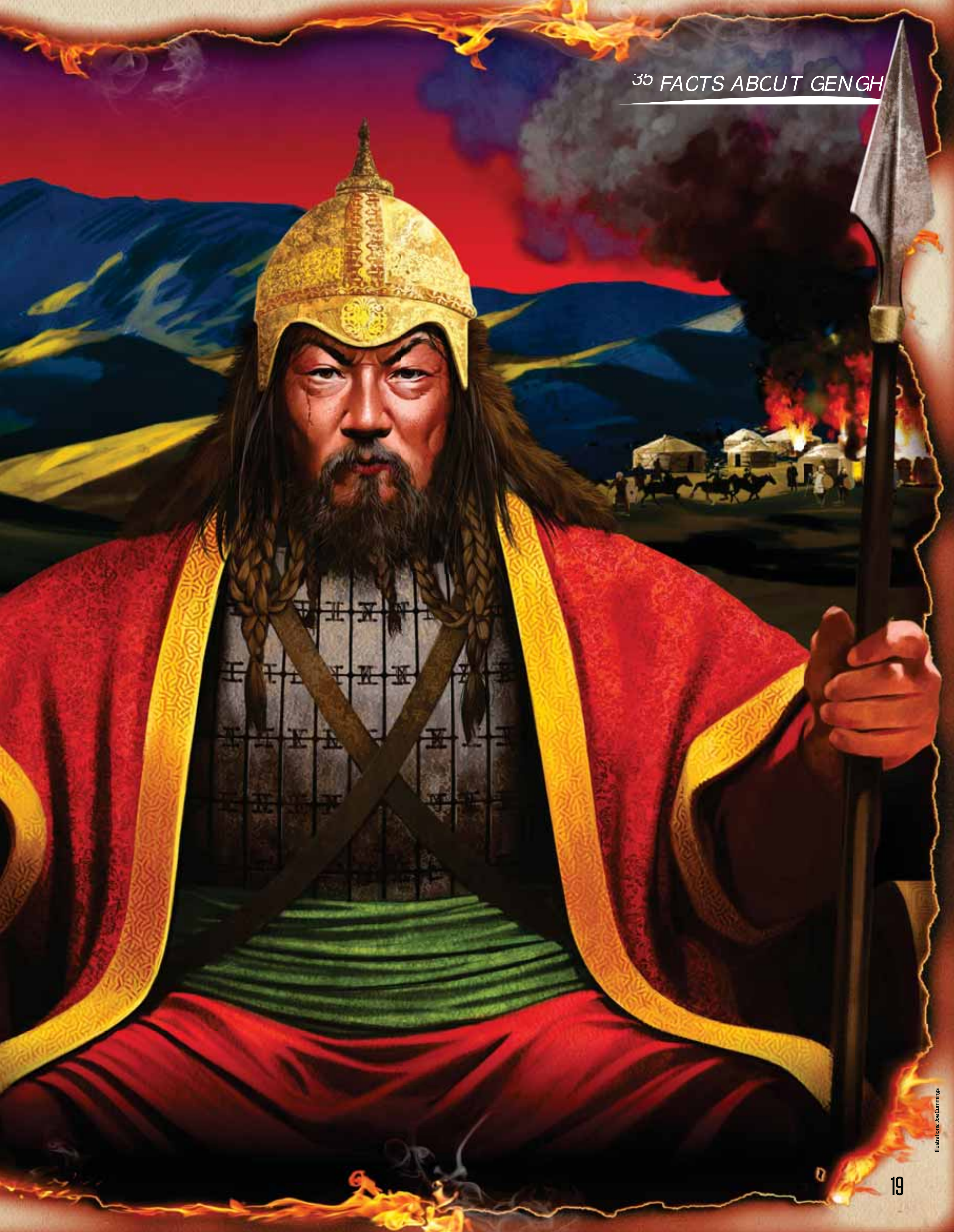
Written by Frances White

On the freezing plains of Mongolia, tribal warfare ravaged the land. Entire villages were burned to ashes overnight, children murdered in their beds and women stolen like property. It was in this atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that a boy called Temüjin was born. Son of a tribal chief, the hot-headed young boy would come to change everything it meant to be Mongolian. Cast out from his tribe before reaching manhood, he returned in a blaze of fire and blood, destroying any who dared to question his god-given power. Under him, the eternal war of the tribes ceased and he was proclaimed universal ruler, king of kings and prince of all that lies between the oceans: Genghis Khan.

The Mongolian lands were his, but this was not enough for Genghis, who had set his sights on loftier prizes. Arrows loaded and bows drawn, his hoard of ferocious warriors rode through Asia, trampling all who lay in their path. Mountains of bones and fields drenched with blood served as a warning of the unbridled power of his mounted warriors, a force that enabled the Great Khan's empire to expand rapidly.

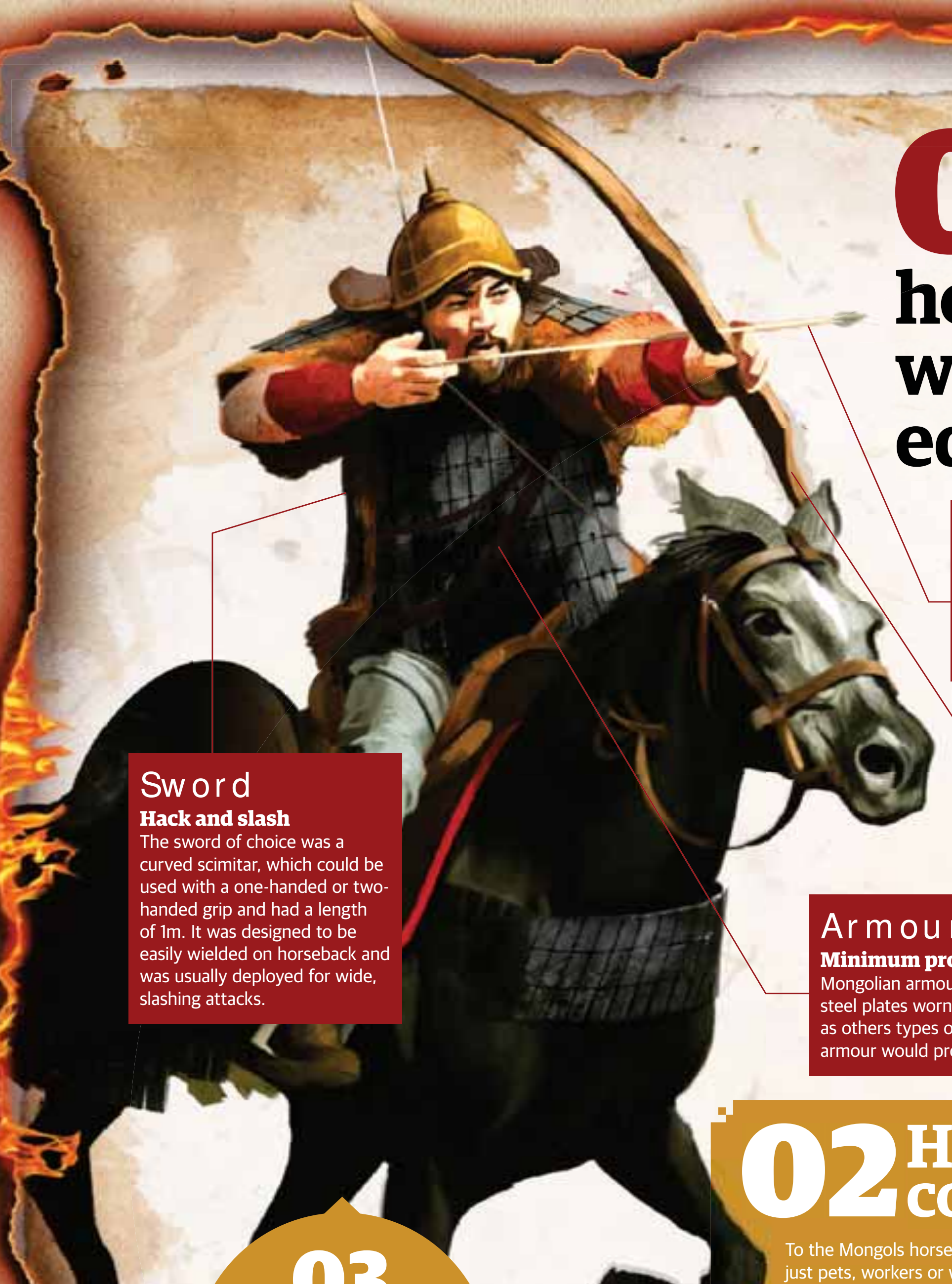
Through his brutal conquests Genghis would achieve something remarkable: the unification of all Mongolia, a land previously riven by internal conflicts between rival tribes. From a stable Mongolia a sprawling empire would grow. Trade would flourish under his rule, and those previously persecuted for religion were welcomed with open arms, while men of ordinary birth rose to command armies.

In the hundreds of years after his death, some would call Genghis father of the Mongols, others a terror that scourged the land. What no one has ever doubted is that he changed the face of the world forever.



Illustrations: Joe Cummings

01 His Mongolian horse warriors were perfectly equipped for battle



Arrow

Piercing through enemy defences

Different arrows were used depending on the situation; the whistle arrow was hollowed out and produced a whistling sound when fired, perfect for striking terror into the enemy. Flaming arrows were also used to cause horrific wounds to enemies and destroy wooden villages and cities.

Bow

The mighty Mongol weapon

Mongolian warriors used many different types of bows, all smaller than the bows used today. With an impressive range of over 500m, traditional bows were made from bamboo, horn and sinew, all bound together with animal glue.

Armour

Minimum protection for maximum flexibility

Mongolian armour was crafted from a combination of boiled leather and steel plates worn on the chest, boots and arms. Although not as advanced as others types of contemporary armour, the combination of light and heavy armour would provide protection while enabling the rider to use their bow.

Sword

Hack and slash

The sword of choice was a curved scimitar, which could be used with a one-handed or two-handed grip and had a length of 1m. It was designed to be easily wielded on horseback and was usually deployed for wide, slashing attacks.

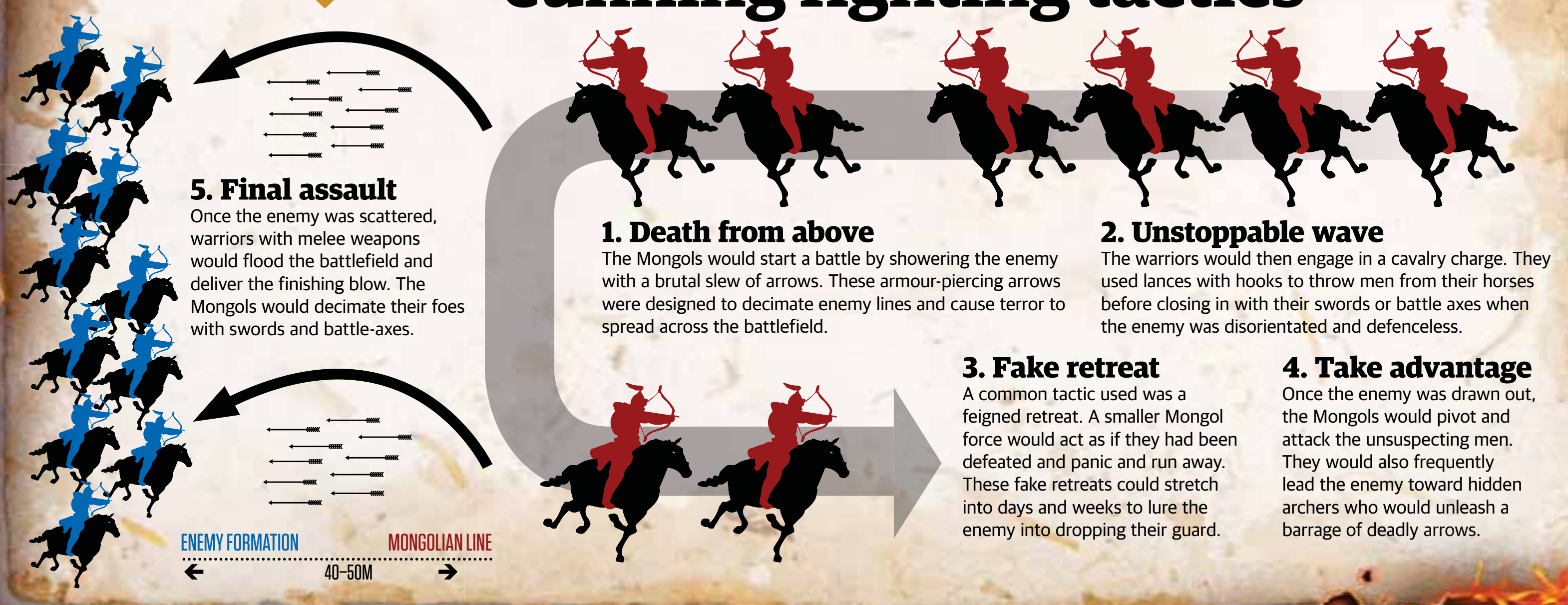
02 Horses were spiritual companions

To the Mongols horses were more than just pets, workers or war steeds; they were essential spiritual companions. Every warrior would be accompanied by a herd of horses as remounts, and while three to five was average, some individual herds had as many as 20 horses. Genghis Khan utilised these armies of mounted warriors to cross treacherous mountains and once said, "It is easy to conquer the world from the back of a horse."

03

Genghis went to war against his childhood friend Jamukha. Upon offering him mercy, Jamukah uttered, "As there is room for only one sun in the sky, there is room only for one Mongol lord."

04 Mongol warriors used cunning fighting tactics



1. Death from above

The Mongols would start a battle by showering the enemy with a brutal slew of arrows. These armour-piercing arrows were designed to decimate enemy lines and cause terror to spread across the battlefield.

2. Unstoppable wave

The warriors would then engage in a cavalry charge. They used lances with hooks to throw men from their horses before closing in with their swords or battle axes when the enemy was disorientated and defenceless.

3. Fake retreat

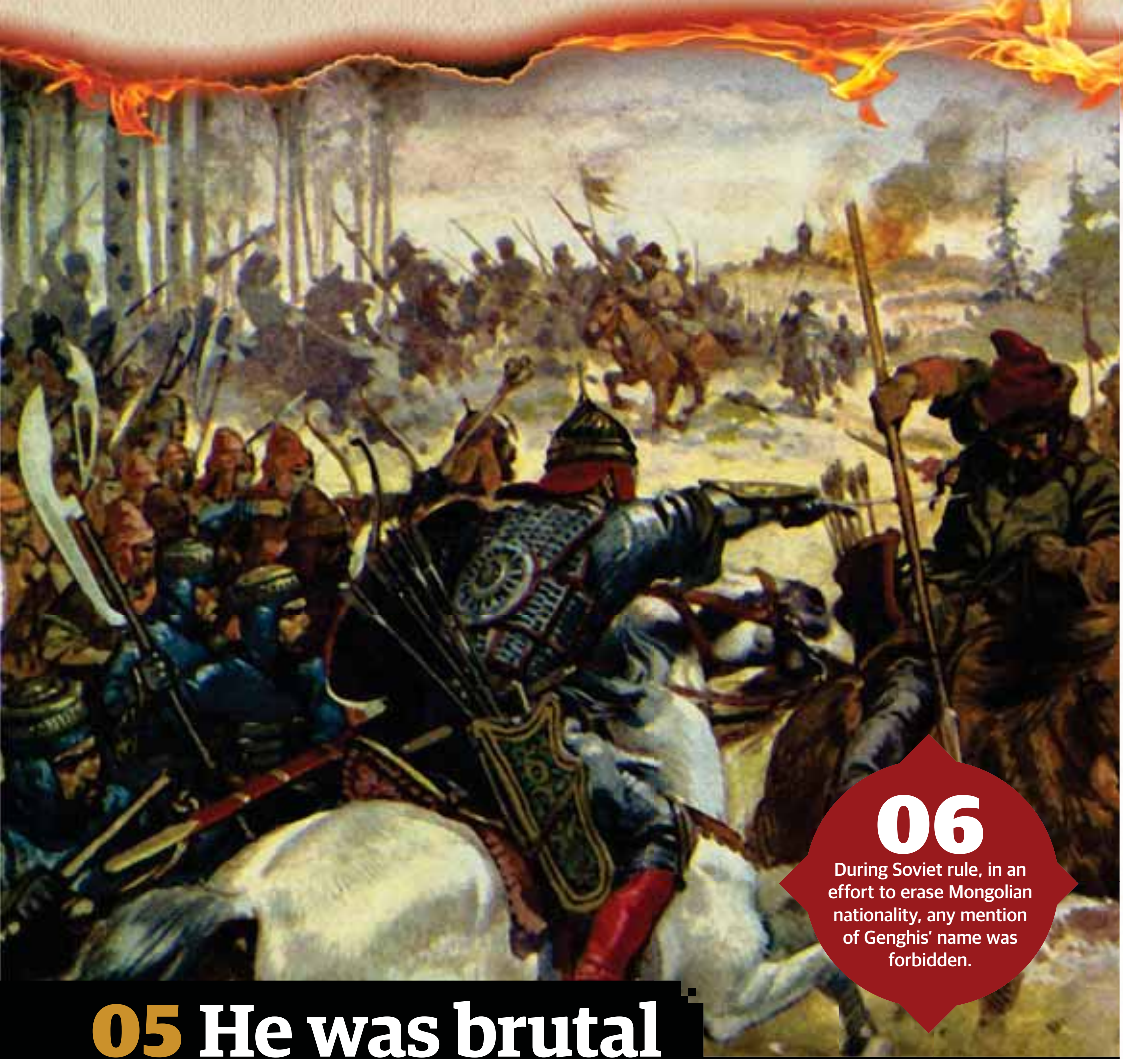
A common tactic used was a feigned retreat. A smaller Mongol force would act as if they had been defeated and panic and run away. These fake retreats could stretch into days and weeks to lure the enemy into dropping their guard.

4. Take advantage

Once the enemy was drawn out, the Mongols would pivot and attack the unsuspecting men. They would also frequently lead the enemy toward hidden archers who would unleash a barrage of deadly arrows.

5. Final assault

Once the enemy was scattered, warriors with melee weapons would flood the battlefield and deliver the finishing blow. The Mongols would decimate their foes with swords and battle-axes.



06

During Soviet rule, in an effort to erase Mongolian nationality, any mention of Genghis' name was forbidden.

05 He was brutal

The attack on Samarkand

Upon the fall of their city, the population of Samarkand, Uzbekistan, including women, children and even pets, were assembled outside. They were all brutally slain and a pyramid of their severed heads was erected as a symbol of victory and warning to any others who dare oppose the Khan's power.

Assault on Urgench

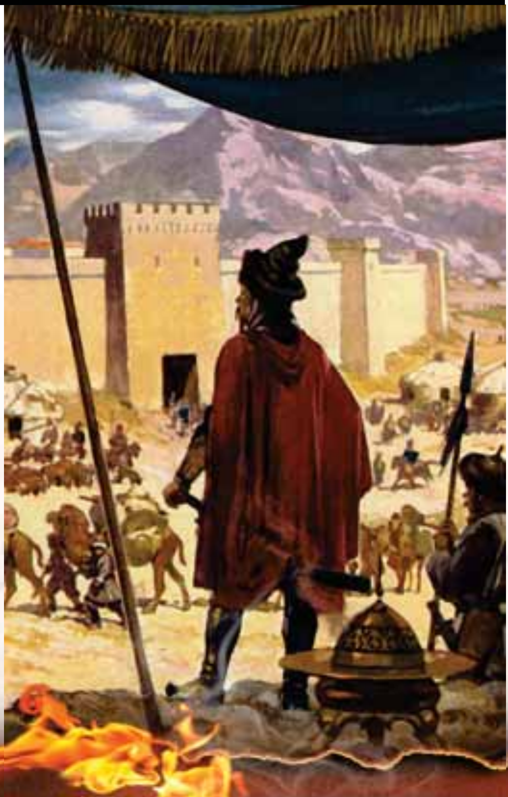
Towards the end of the Mongol invasion of Khwarezmia (1219–1221) all the women and children of the city of Urgench were sold as slaves, while the remaining population was killed. The ancient scholar Juvayni estimated that 50,000 soldiers executed approximately 1.2 million people in the city.

Measuring against the linchpin

When Genghis defeated Jamukha's tribes in 1202, he forced the males to walk beside a wagon wheel. There was a pin inserted at the end of the axle, known as a linchpin. Any man whose head was higher than the linchpin was considered a threat and immediately executed.

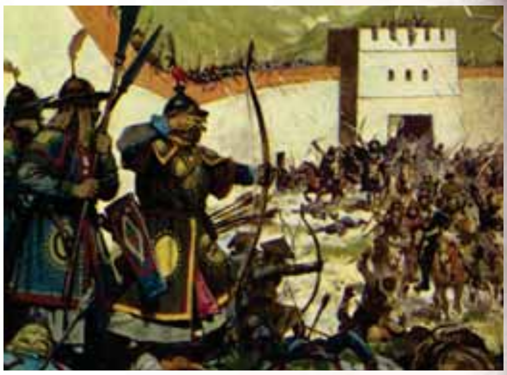
07 Scores were settled

Genghis saw the opportunity to establish links with the Khwarezmian Empire as a trading partner, so he sent a goodwill caravan filled with 500 men to start the process. The Khwarezmian governor had other thoughts, though, looting the caravan and imprisoning the men. Undeterred, Genghis sent a further three ambassadors to the shah himself. What the Great Khan received back was one of their heads; it would prove to be a fatal mistake for the shah. Outraged, the lord of war arranged one of his largest invasions ever. 200,000 Mongolian soldiers quickly defeated the shah's forces and the governor was captured and executed by having moulten silver poured into his ears and eyes. All remnants of the empire were destroyed and its populations decimated. A river was even diverted over the emperor's birthplace to wipe it from existence.



08 The weather was kind to him

Genghis Khan and his Mongol tribes competed with a challenging environment of unforgiving deserts in the south and deathly cold mountains in the north and west. Battling extremely cold winters as low as -30 degrees Celsius and suffering from an intense drought, resources were low and tensions were high. However, in 1211 a stroke of luck blessed the lands with the wettest and warmest weather for approximately 1,000 years. The heavy rainfall undoubtedly aided Genghis' rise as the grass that fed the Mongol's all-important horses and livestock grew in abundance. His army benefited from the much-needed horsepower and ample supply of meat, which enabled it to wage its epic conquests against the world. The heavy rainfall ended in 1225, two years before the death of the Great Khan.



09 He had a difficult upbringing

As the son of a clan leader, young Temüjin's future should have been straightforward, but fate had other ideas. When his father was poisoned by the rival Tatar tribe, Temüjin tried to claim his rightful place as chief, but the clan weren't impressed. Deemed too young for leadership, the not yet ten-year-old boy and his family were cast out of the tribe and left to fend for themselves in the unforgiving Mongolian wilderness. It was during this period that Temüjin caught his older half-brother hiding food. He killed him and instated himself as head of the family, saving them from starvation.

Images: Joe Cummings (01); Look & Learn (05, 07, 08)

10 Quality was the key to his military success

Genghis' command structure

Khagan
Translated to 'Khan of Khans', or 'king of kings', a Khagan was the equivalent of an emperor. The Khagan held supreme power and had the final say on all matters concerning his empire. The title would be passed down to the chosen heir, usually the Khan's son, upon the death of the reigning Khagan.

Kheshig
The Kheshig served as the imperial guard for the Khagan and his family. Divided into a day guard and a night guard, the Kheshig would ensure the safety of the Mongol royalty. The Kheshig were separate from the Mongol army and would not join them in battle.

Noyan
Noyans were military generals who were in charge of units of Tumens (a unit of 10,000 soldiers) and sometimes Mingghans. While their main task was commanding forces and waging warfare, they also organised the administration of captured territories and were regarded as Mongolian aristocracy.

Mingghan
A Mingghan would command a military force of thousands of men, comprised of 100 arbans. These commanders earned their position by showing their worth on the battlefield.

Zuut
A Zuut was a force of hundreds of men who selected their own leader from their lines. The delegate enjoyed relative freedom in battle to give orders and take actions he considered best, but he had to report to the leader above him.

Arban
Similar to the Zuut, an Arban was a force of ten men who would elect their own leader. The men in the unit were expected to show strict loyalty to one another, and if one soldier fled from battle then all in his Arban would face the death penalty.

11 The Mongols were a group of warring tribes

When Genghis Khan of the Borjigin clan began his ascent to power the Mongol land was split between many tribes. The roots of the divisions and feuds between these tribes extended far into the past and any chance of peaceful resolution was marred by constant fighting, burning of villages, murder, raping and pillaging. In reality, the Mongol clans were so focused on fighting each other and expended so much energy and manpower doing this that they didn't really pose a major threat to any other power.

Three Mongolian tribes:

Keraites
Known for their dark features and black hair, earning the nickname 'Black Tatar.' Genghis Khan was named after their famous leader, Temüjin-üge.

Naimans
When this tribe elected Genghis' childhood friend Jamukha as 'universal ruler' they received the full wrath of the future Great Khan as a result.

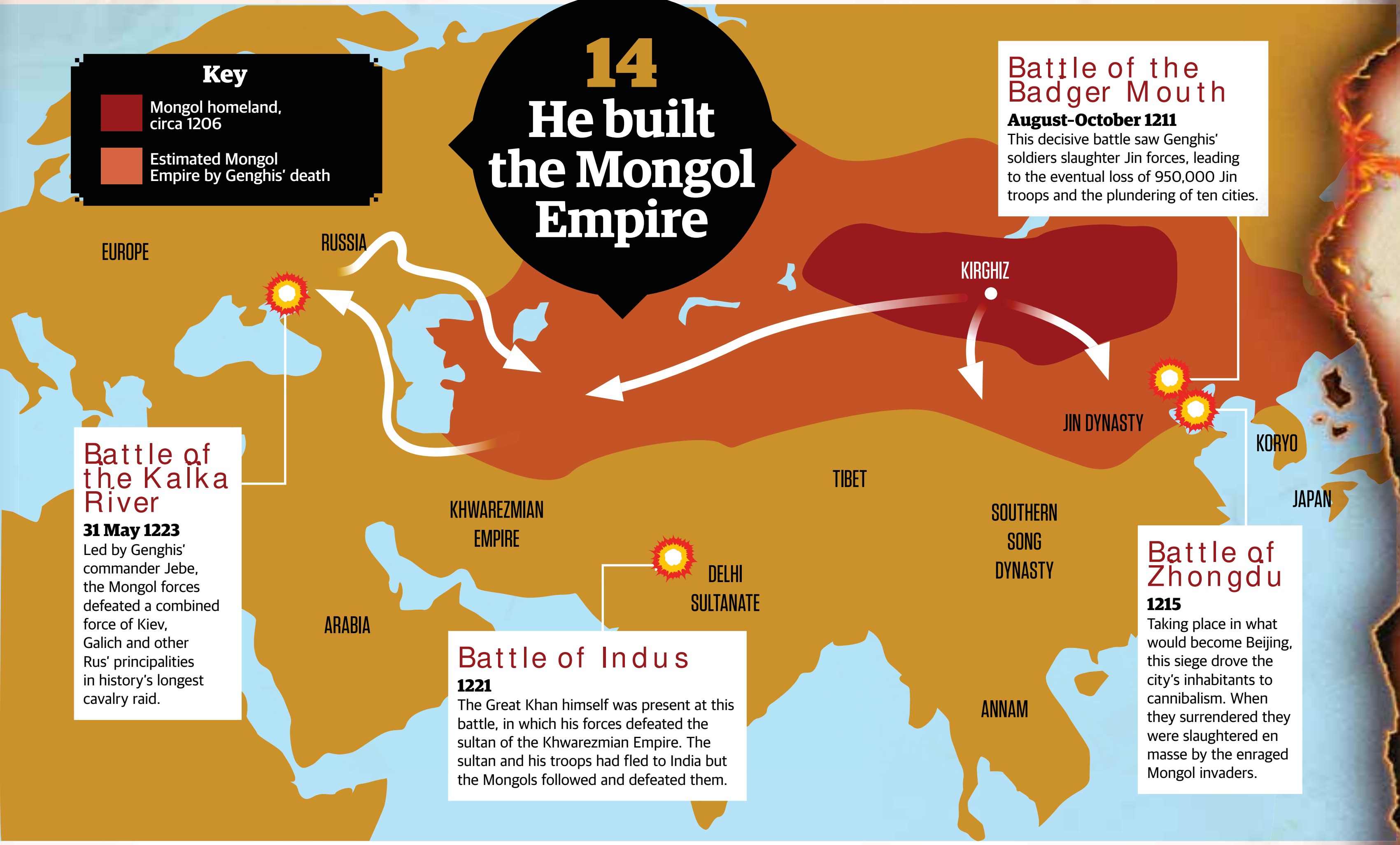
Mergid
This Mongolian tribe are known for kidnapping Genghis' wife Börte and casting doubt on the paternity of her first son, Jochi.

12
Legend has it that at Genghis Khan's funeral ceremony 40 horses and 40 virgins were slaughtered in a ritual sacrifice.

13 No one really knows what he looked like

Genghis Khan forbade anyone from sculpting his image, painting his portrait or engraving his likeness, and it was some years after his death that the first images emerged of the Mongol leader. Although we can't know for sure what he looked like, many sources describe a tall man with long, reddish-brown hair, a beard and green eyes.

14 He built the Mongol Empire



Key

🟥	Mongol homeland, circa 1206
🟧	Estimated Mongol Empire by Genghis' death

Battle of the Badger Mouth

August-October 1211

This decisive battle saw Genghis' soldiers slaughter Jin forces, leading to the eventual loss of 950,000 Jin troops and the plundering of ten cities.

Battle of the Kalka River

31 May 1223

Led by Genghis' commander Jebe, the Mongol forces defeated a combined force of Kiev, Galich and other Rus' principalities in history's longest cavalry raid.

Battle of Indus

1221

The Great Khan himself was present at this battle, in which his forces defeated the sultan of the Khwarezmian Empire. The sultan and his troops had fled to India but the Mongols followed and defeated them.

Battle of Zhongdu

1215

Taking place in what would become Beijing, this siege drove the city's inhabitants to cannibalism. When they surrendered they were slaughtered en masse by the enraged Mongol invaders.

15 He built worldwide trade routes

As a proof of his vision and cunning, Genghis Khan understood that trade was of vital importance in order to ensure the economic survival of his empire, and it quickly became his priority. With a newly conquered land beneath his feet, he was keen to establish trade routes with Asia and Europe, as the Mongols themselves produced very few goods of value. The unified land that the Great Khan had created meant that travel across Asia was made much easier for Europeans and Western traders like Marco Polo. Artists and craftsmen flooded into the empire, creating settlements along the main trade routes, and new artistic influences began to meld with established traditions across all of Eurasia. What followed was a period of artistic and cultural flowering in the wake of bloody and brutal conquest.

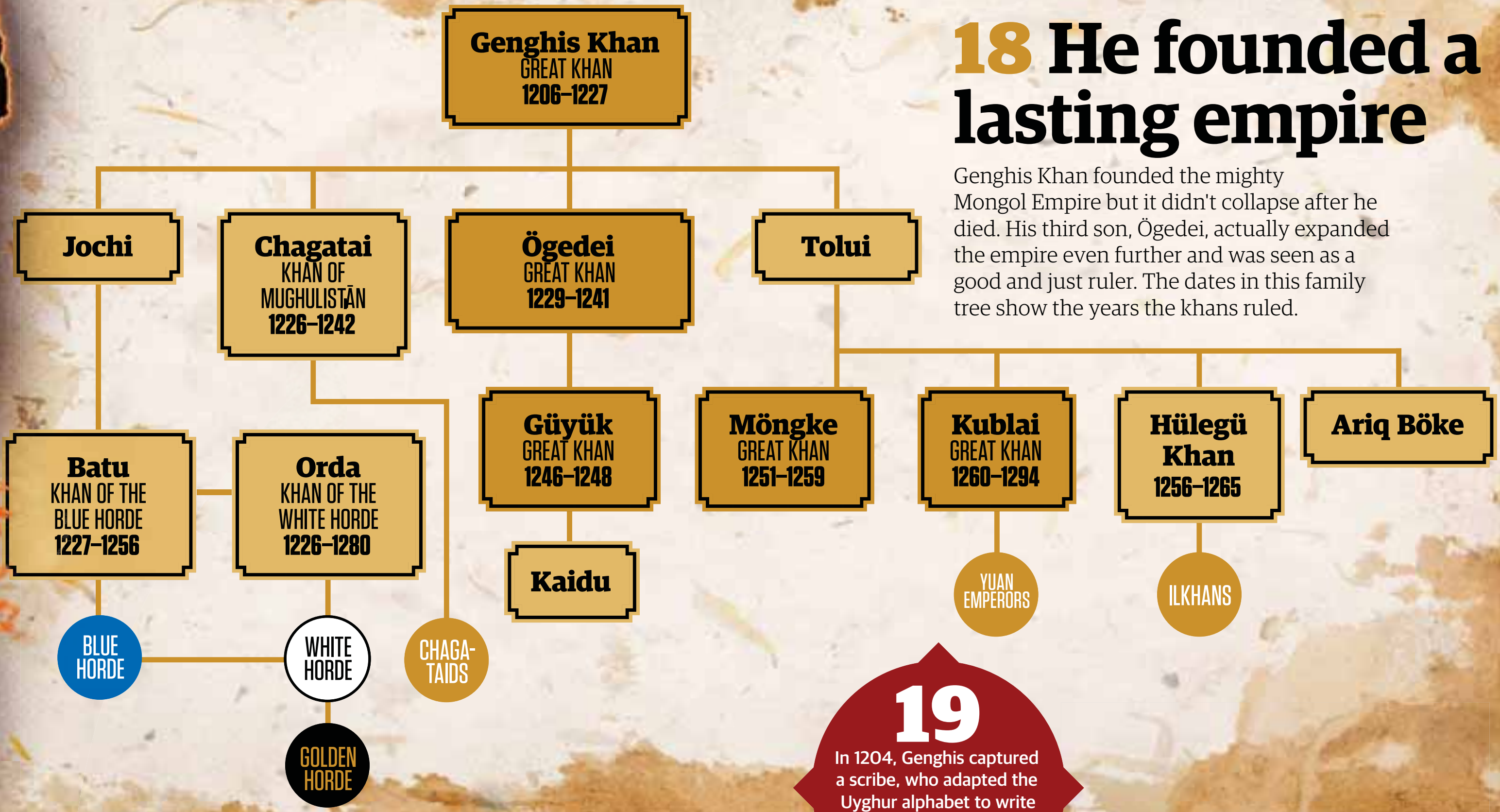
16

Genghis created the Yassa, a code of laws that promoted obedience to him, unity of tribes and the punishment of crimes.

17 Religious freedom was encouraged

Unusually for a mass conqueror, Genghis Khan encouraged religious freedom and tolerance throughout his empire. Rather than stating Mongolian dominance, he embraced the differing cultures of the lands he conquered. This openness with religion meant he could benefit from those exiled or persecuted elsewhere because of their beliefs and utilise their skills for his own empire, as well as develop a network of spies. Many Muslims seeking peace from religious persecution sought out the Great Khan, and his acceptance of all religions earned him the title 'defender of religions'. Within Genghis' inner circle there were Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and animists like himself. He often discussed spirituality at great length, even summoning the Taoist leader Qiu Chuji to try and obtain the secret of immortality.

Images: Joe Cummings (10); Alamy (13); Look & Learn (17)


Genghis Khan
GREAT KHAN
1206–1227
Jochi
Chagatai
KHAN OF MUGHULISTĀN
1226–1242
Ögedei
GREAT KHAN
1229–1241
Tolui
Batu
KHAN OF THE BLUE HORDE
1227–1256
Orda
KHAN OF THE WHITE HORDE
1226–1280
Güyük
GREAT KHAN
1246–1248
Möngke
GREAT KHAN
1251–1259
Kublai
GREAT KHAN
1260–1294
Hülegü Khan
1256–1265
Ariq Böke
Kaidu
BLUE HORDE
WHITE HORDE
CHAGA-TAIDS
GOLDEN HORDE
YUAN EMPERORS
ILKHANS

18 He founded a lasting empire

Genghis Khan founded the mighty Mongol Empire but it didn't collapse after he died. His third son, Ögedei, actually expanded the empire even further and was seen as a good and just ruler. The dates in this family tree show the years the khans ruled.

19

In 1204, Genghis captured a scribe, who adapted the Uyghur alphabet to write Mongolian. A slightly amended version is still used today.

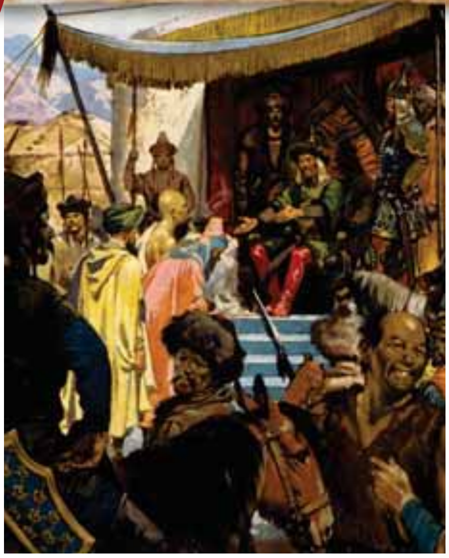
20 He had many wives and concubines

As per the Mongol tradition, Genghis Khan was betrothed to the daughter of a tribe chief at a young age. Soon after they were wed Genghis' wife Börte was kidnapped by a rival tribe, prompting Genghis to form alliances in order to rescue her.

Although he had at least six wives during his reign, only Börte's sons were eligible for succession. All of Genghis' wives ruled their own court, were given regions as territory and would even rule in his stead when he was unable to.

It was common practice for Genghis and his Mongol horde to divide captive women between them after a successful conquest. Genghis was said to be fond of women with small noses, long hair, rounded hips, red lips and melodious voices, and they would always be from the highest rank. He measured the women's beauty in carats, and women rated a low number were given to officers.

Although we can't know the exact number, it's estimated that Genghis had at least 500 concubines. He once expressed his fondness for the opposite gender by saying, "The greatest pleasure is to vanquish your enemies and chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth and see those dear to them bathed in tears, to ride their horses and clasp to your bosom their wives and daughters."



21 He brought stability to the Silk Road

A brief history of the famous trade route

The Silk Road served as a vital trading route, connecting the west and east. After enjoying a flourish of trade in the Tang era from 618 to 907 CE, the route was ravaged with frequent looting of caravans as political unrest plagued the region. Although brutal, Genghis' conquest of Asia unified the warring states and brought a new stability to the trade network. Once again, the Silk Road could safely be used by traders who claimed "a maiden bearing a nugget of gold on her head could wander safely throughout the realm".

139-115 BCE
The imperial envoy Zhang Qian takes several journeys to the western regions and his findings reveal ample opportunity for trade not being exploited.

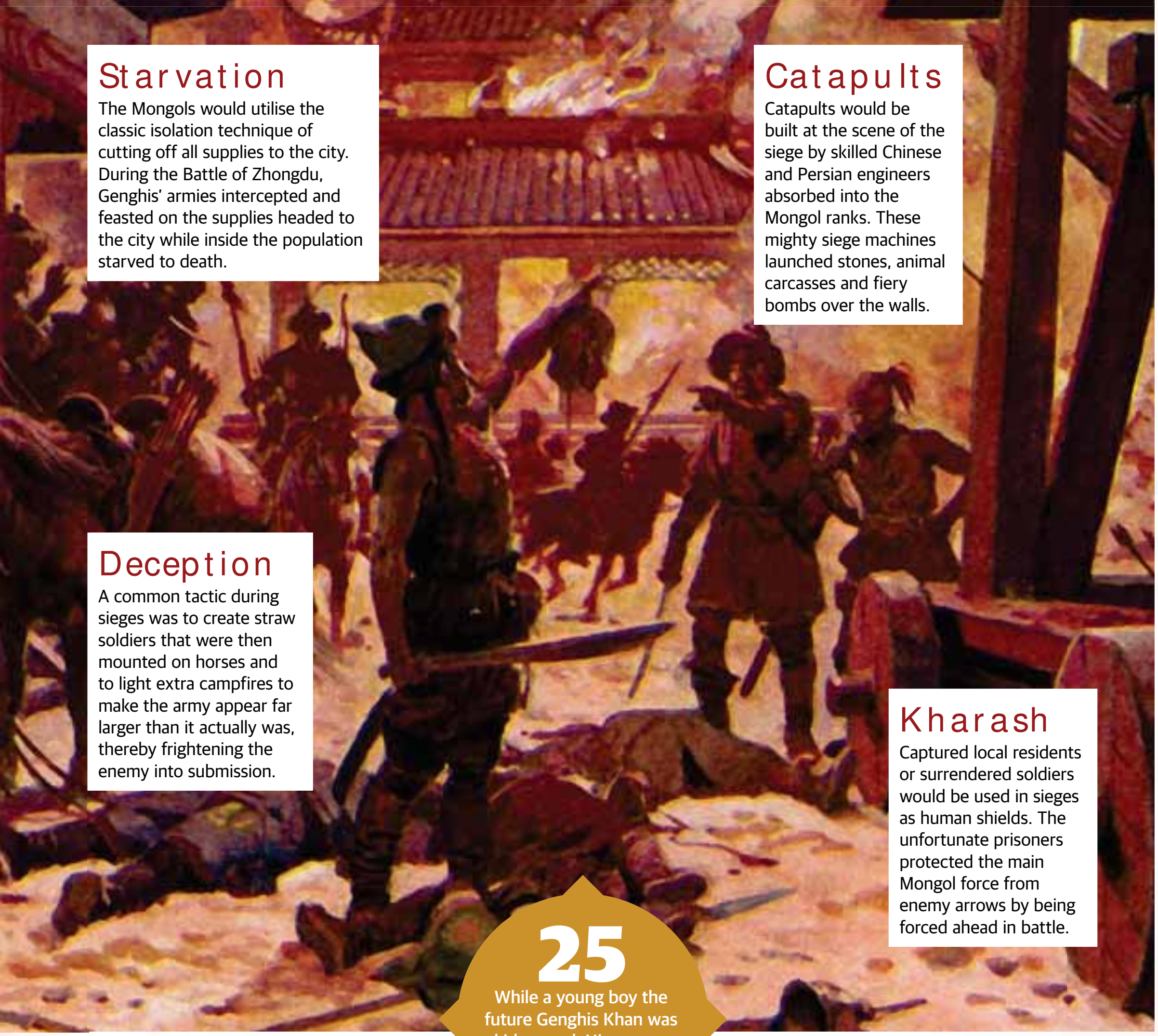
133-67 BCE
The Chinese army defeats the Xiongnu, a nomadic people. By establishing themselves in Central Asia, the Silk Road is opened for international trade.

60 BCE
The Han dynasty establishes the Protectorate of the Western Regions. This protects trade from bandits and greatly increases the safety of trade.

618-907 CE
As the powerful imperial Tang dynasty is established, the Silk Road experiences its golden age as its route becomes even safer than before for traders using it.

22 He became an expert in siege warfare

Many of the citizens living in China believed their strong city walls would protect them from the Mongol threat as they had previously waged death and destruction on horseback. However, through his skilled captives, Genghis became a master in the art of siege warfare, and soon not even towns behind sturdy walls were safe. It was thanks to this Mongol ability to adapt that many cities were captured.



Starvation

The Mongols would utilise the classic isolation technique of cutting off all supplies to the city. During the Battle of Zhongdu, Genghis' armies intercepted and feasted on the supplies headed to the city while inside the population starved to death.

Catapults

Catapults would be built at the scene of the siege by skilled Chinese and Persian engineers absorbed into the Mongol ranks. These mighty siege machines launched stones, animal carcasses and fiery bombs over the walls.

Deception

A common tactic during sieges was to create straw soldiers that were then mounted on horses and to light extra campfires to make the army appear far larger than it actually was, thereby frightening the enemy into submission.

Kharash

Captured local residents or surrendered soldiers would be used in sieges as human shields. The unfortunate prisoners protected the main Mongol force from enemy arrows by being forced ahead in battle.

25

While a young boy the future Genghis Khan was kidnapped. His escape elevated his reputation throughout the Mongol nation.

907-1207
Security along the route falls with the Tang dynasty. Once again trade caravans are plundered by various nomadic tribes, making the route less profitable.

1207-1227
Genghis Khan's conquests and unification of states encourage interaction between different cultures and the route becomes an important communication path.

1287-1288
After Genghis' death the Silk Road continues to provide a reliable route for trade. Marco Polo's tales lead more Western traders to use the road.

23 His mightiest weapon was fear

Genghis presented his enemies with a choice: surrender or die. It was far more preferable to the Mongols for their enemies to surrender peacefully than losing soldiers, money and food through combat, and protection was offered to any town that wouldn't put up resistance. Of course, any opposition would be met with mass destruction and death.

Genghis deliberately shaped public opinion, similar to modern-day propaganda, but his aim wasn't to curry favour; he wished to create an aura of terror. Tales of destruction, inflated death tolls and written accounts of his brutal conquests by scribes were all used to build an atmosphere of fear and hopefully encourage terrified obedience among any who stood in his way.

24 He was an eco-warrior

As a result of Genghis Khan's brutal conquests, entire civilisations and vast plains of territory were decimated; this had the knock-on effect of allowing previously populated and cultivated land to flourish. Carbon-dioxide levels plummeted and new trees absorbed as much of the gas as is now produced in a year worldwide by petrol.

26 His execution squads were merciless

Historical sources claim Genghis Khan's conquests resulted in horrifically high numbers of casualties, such as 2.4 million at Nishapur and 1.6 million at the sacking of Herat. Although it's difficult to ascertain the reliability of these figures, it does indicate the terrified state of mind the invasions created. The unfortunate population of a captured town that didn't surrender were ordered to stand outside while Mongolian troops executed them one by one with a battle-axe. The soldiers were commanded to kill a certain number of people each - ten, 20 or 50 - and it wasn't uncommon for the soldiers to obtain 'proof' of their deeds by cutting off an ear of each victim. Escape was impossible, as the Mongols would return to search the city for anybody left behind.

Images: Look & Learn

27 Enemies were turned into allies

Genghis Khan is commonly portrayed as being brutal and merciless, but his intelligence and cunning is often overlooked. Rather than simply having his men plough through the cities he captured, he hand-picked the mightiest soldiers and brightest minds and welcomed them into his empire. It was thanks to this that his armies had men with knowledge of siege warfare, enabling the great hordes to take fortified cities. During the Battle of the Thirteen Sides, Genghis was injured by an arrow to the neck. He demanded to know who fired the arrow and, when an archer admitted his act, Genghis praised him for his aim and honesty. Jebe went on to become one of Genghis' greatest and most loyal commanders.

28 An early postal service was created

Genghis Khan's empire was not only built on fire and warfare but also a vast communication network known as the Yam. The Yam consisted of a long chain of way stations and post houses that stretched all the way across his empire. Once a messenger reached a station, he needed only relay his message or hand the document to the messenger waiting there, who would ride to the next outpost until the message was delivered. This ingenious network allowed information to travel faster than ever before and each station would provide spare horses, food and shelter. Soon the Yam was being used to transport more than mail, with the military, travelling officials and even famous figures such as the Italian explorer Marco Polo using it.

29 He has 16 million living relatives

Although claiming descent (often erroneously) from famous or powerful people has been a popular exercise throughout history, modern developments in DNA testing have discovered that more people than previously imagined may be directly related to the Great Khan. A 2003 study revealed that close to eight per cent of men living in the former Mongol Empire carry identical Y-chromosomes. That eight per cent is 0.5 per cent of the male worldwide population, which translates to a staggering 16 million descendants alive today! This lineage has been tracked to about 1,000 years ago, and the very special set of circumstances required for such a vast spread of DNA lead to one man - a certain Genghis Khan. His empire spanned from Asia to the Caspian Sea and was characterised by widespread brutality and rape. The number of offspring his own sons boasted was staggering, with his eldest alone having a reported 40 sons and numerous daughters. Although this theory is impossible to confirm without a sample of Genghis' own DNA, it does seem likely that these identical chromosomes are linked in some way to Great Khan.

Genghis' descendants include

8%

of men living in the former Mongol Empire

0.5%

of worldwide population

16 MILLION

worldwide (almost double the population of London)

30

There were long-standing doubts over the paternity of his oldest son, Jochi, so his third son, Ögedei, was named successor.

31

Genghis believed he had been put in place by God. He once said, "If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you."

AK 3406109
AK 3406109

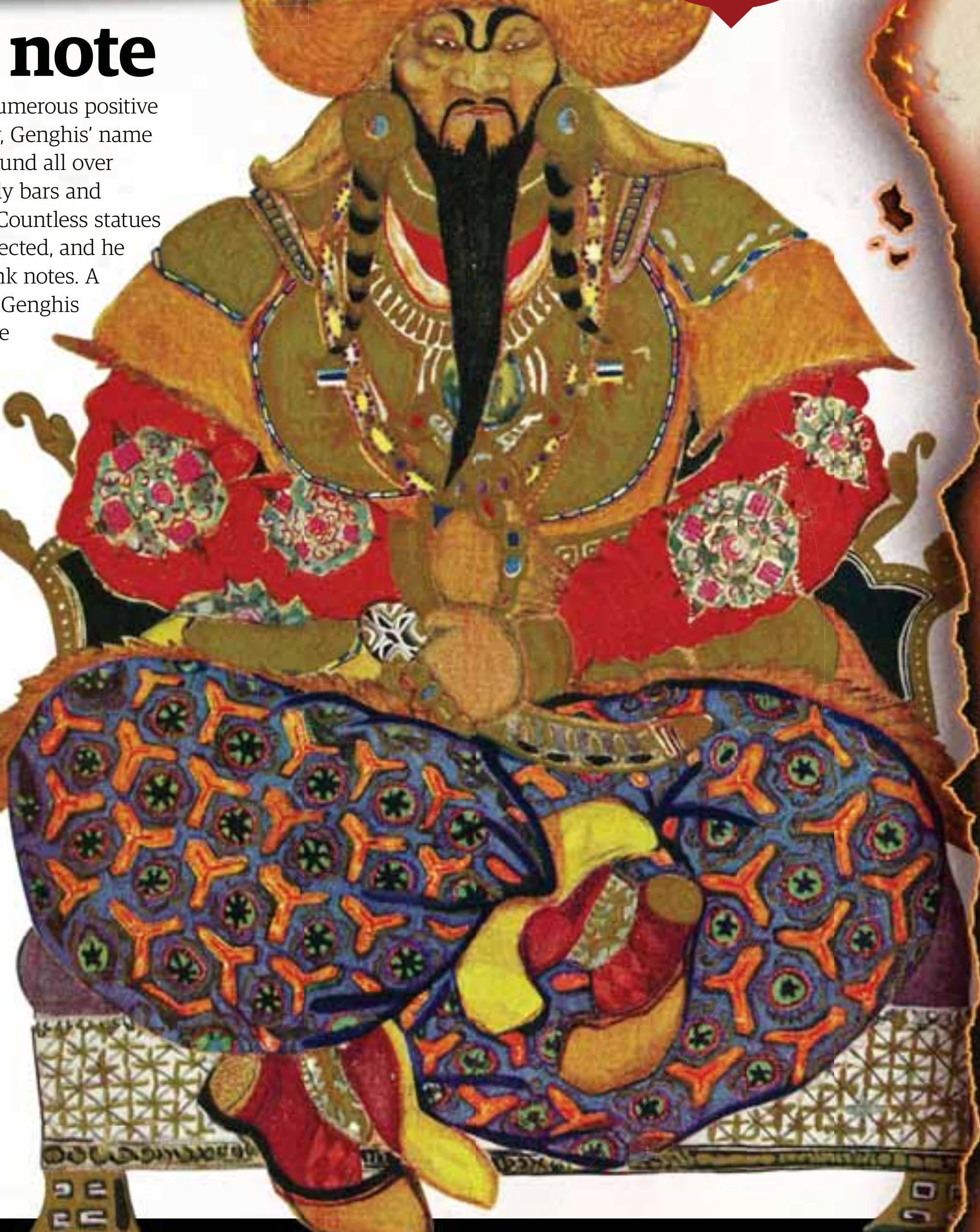
32 He is on a bank note

Despite many negative views of him, in Mongolia Genghis Khan is revered as a national hero. Many residents refer to the country as 'Genghis Khan's Mongolia' and themselves as 'Khan's children'. This image of Genghis as the father of the Mongol people has elevated him to a godlike figure who united warring tribes and founded an empire. Many Mongolians even claim historical writings by non-Mongolians exaggerate his brutality and downplay his numerous positive contributions. Today, Genghis' name and image can be found all over Mongolia, from candy bars and cigarettes to hotels. Countless statues of him have been erected, and he even features on bank notes. A local story says that Genghis Khan will one day be reborn to return the Mongol nation to prosperity.

33 He believed in meritocracy

Genghis challenged existing Mongolian ideas by promoting people based on worth rather than birthright. Although this caused friction among wealthy sons who expected to claim positions of power, it enabled his army to become one of the most powerful in history. Those who rose through the ranks were those who had shown their competence in battle, which led to a tight-knit army led by skilled warriors.

This also extended to daily life, as Genghis abolished inherited aristocratic titles, a common catalyst for wars between tribes at the time. Rather than slaughtering his enemies en masse, he hand-picked the most skilled and capable to add to his ranks, regardless of nationality or race, so soon the Mongol Empire became culturally diverse. He was also clever enough to realise that he alone could not rule an entire empire, so he employed skilled administrators from conquered cities to govern in his stead, a task unsuited to the nomadic Mongol people. Of course, this meritocracy didn't extend to his own family, and he decreed that only a member of his family, 'the Golden Family', could claim the highest authority.



34

An estimated 40 million people were killed under his rule, which if true makes him more lethal than Hitler and Stalin combined.

35 No one knows how he died

Genghis Khan died in August 1227, but the exact cause and nature of his death is unknown to this day. The common belief held by historians is that he fell from his horse while on a hunt and died soon after of injuries and fatigue. Others argue that he died from a respiratory disease, and the great explorer Marco Polo recorded that the Great Khan died from an infected arrow wound. One of the more outlandish tales of his demise is that a captured Xia princess castrated him with a hidden dagger, though this is most likely propaganda created by his rivals and not historically credible.

His place of burial also remains a mystery. Following the traditions of his clan, Genghis was buried in an unmarked grave and a river was diverted over it to make it impossible to find. To ensure secrecy, the funeral escort killed anyone they encountered along the way, so the lord of war's final resting place would never be disturbed.

Images: Look & Learn (30); Alamy (31); PranjalBorah CC BY-SA 3.0 (32)

40

62

30

56

54

76

44

74

68

82

Forging an EMPIRE

30 THE MILITARY MIGHT OF THE MONGOLS
Explore what made the Mongol war machine so formidable

40 KEY COMMANDERS
Meet the Great Khan's ruthless dogs of war

44 THE CONQUEST OF CHINA
The bloody, grinding subjugation of China was arguably the Mongols' greatest achievement in the furnace of war

54 SIX MONGOL SACKINGS
If a city dared to resist the Mongol hordes it was instantly condemned to destruction, as these six settlements discovered to their cost

56 CRUSHING KHWAREZMIA
The once-proud Khwarezmian Empire proved no match for a vengeful Genghis

62 INVADING EASTERN EUROPE
With swathes of Asia under its command, the empire sought to expand into the West

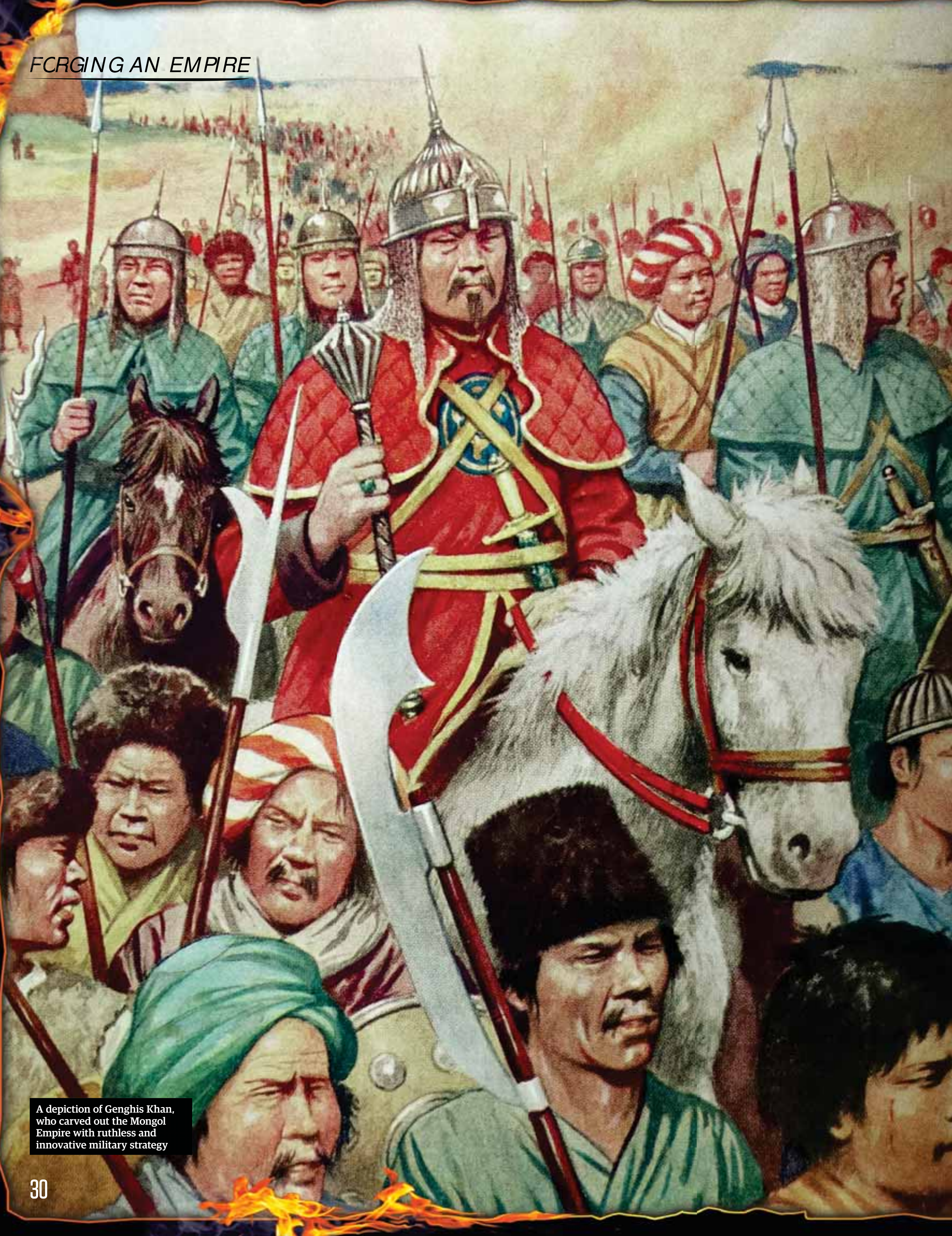
68 THE BATTLE OF MOHI
In the spring of 1241 two armies would collide on the banks of a Hungarian river. The morning would end with a ruthless slaughter

74 SIEGE OF BAGHDAD
A hub of culture and learning in the 13th century, Baghdad's refusal to surrender cost it dearly

76 THE BATTLE OF AIN JALUT
Find out how the Mamluks of Egypt held back the Mongol tide

82 JAPAN
Virtually unstoppable on land, the Mongols launched two doomed naval invasions of Japan

Images: Alamy (p56, p76); Getty Images (p62, yellow-shirted man on horse); Topfoto (solo warrior with arrows); Shutterstock (p44)



A depiction of Genghis Khan, who carved out the Mongol Empire with ruthless and innovative military strategy

Military might OF THE MONGOLS

FEARED AS DEVILS OR THE DESCENDANTS OF MYTHICAL GIANTS, THE MONGOLS' STRENGTH WAS ACTUALLY BASED ON FAMILIAR PRINCIPLES OF MILITARY SUCCESS

Written by david smith

At their height, the Mongols controlled an empire that dwarfed that of the Romans, yet before erupting from the eastern steppes in the 13th century, they were just one of many nomadic tribes in the region, and their main concern was finding adequate grazing for their many sheep, goats and horses.

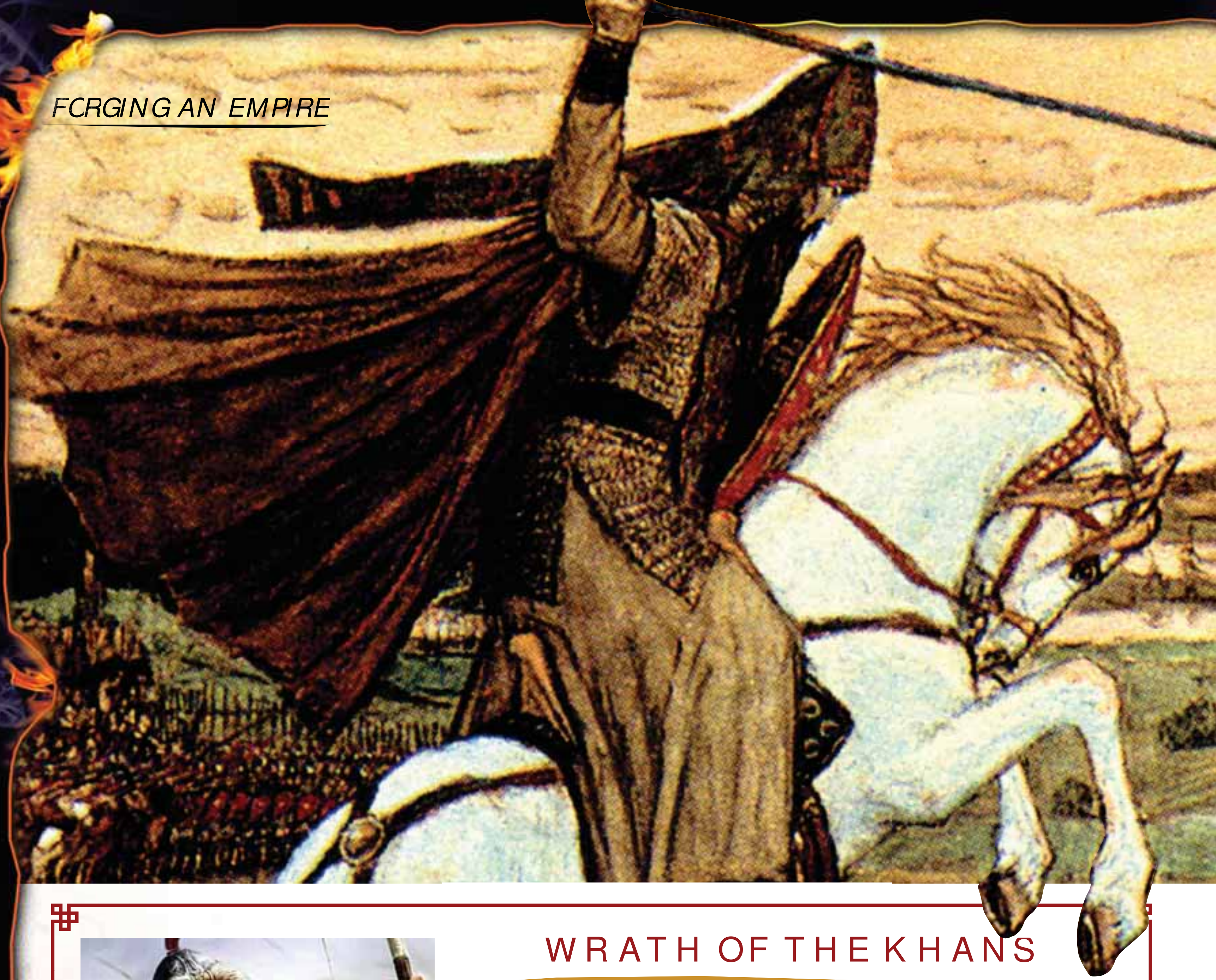
How these hardy but independent tribesmen came to take on the might of China, Japan and even Europe is one of the greatest stories in military history. It is a story that has slipped into cliché and caricature because, unusually, it was not the victors who wrote it. Instead, it was the shocked and traumatised nations that fell under the onslaught that recorded the events, and the Medieval European imagination, starved of hard data about the wider world, was all too ready to dream up terrifying stories of mounted demons.

The intentions of these early chroniclers were often to belittle the Mongols' staggering achievements. Their successes were attributed to overwhelming numbers, their strategic withdrawals recast as defeats, and they were ultimately written off as unspeakably cruel, inhuman barbarians.

Eyewitnesses were able to offer more substantiated and down-to-earth assessments of the Mongols. The Persian historian Atâ-Malik Juvayni, who spent years living with the Mongols, remarked of their army, "It is an army after the fashion of a peasantry… It is also a peasantry in the guise of an army."

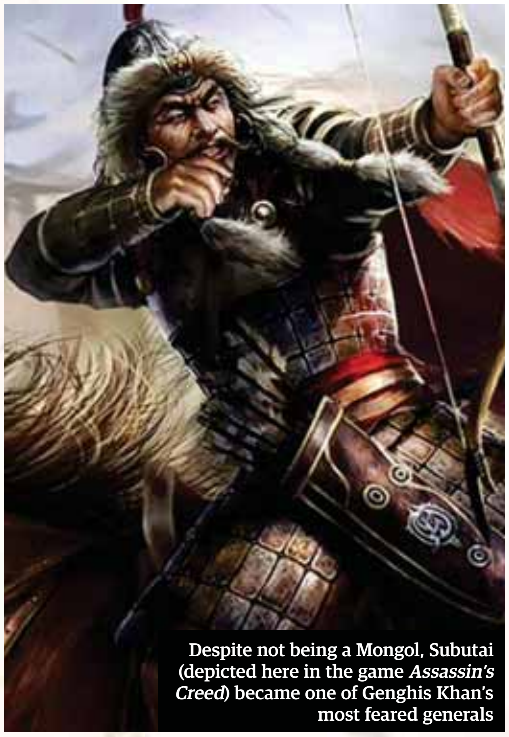
The truth is that the Mongols had built one of the most formidable war machines the world has ever seen, and this could not have been done by mindless barbarians. The secrets to their success lay not in savagery but in the same qualities that underpin any successful military force: training, weapons, tactics, strategy, mobility and discipline, all welded together by a titan of war.

Image: Getty Images



WRATH OF THE KHANS

THE GREATEST GENERAL IN THE HISTORY OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE, SUBUTAI BAGHATUR (SUBUTAI THE VALIANT) WASN'T EVEN A MONGOL



Despite not being a Mongol, Subutai (depicted here in the game *Assassin's Creed*) became one of Genghis Khan's most feared generals

Subutai overcame humble origins to become the greatest of all Mongol generals. The son of a blacksmith and one of the 'Reindeer People', he was not technically a Mongol at all. In fact, Genghis Khan launched a military operation to bring the Reindeer People under his control, so he was technically an enemy.

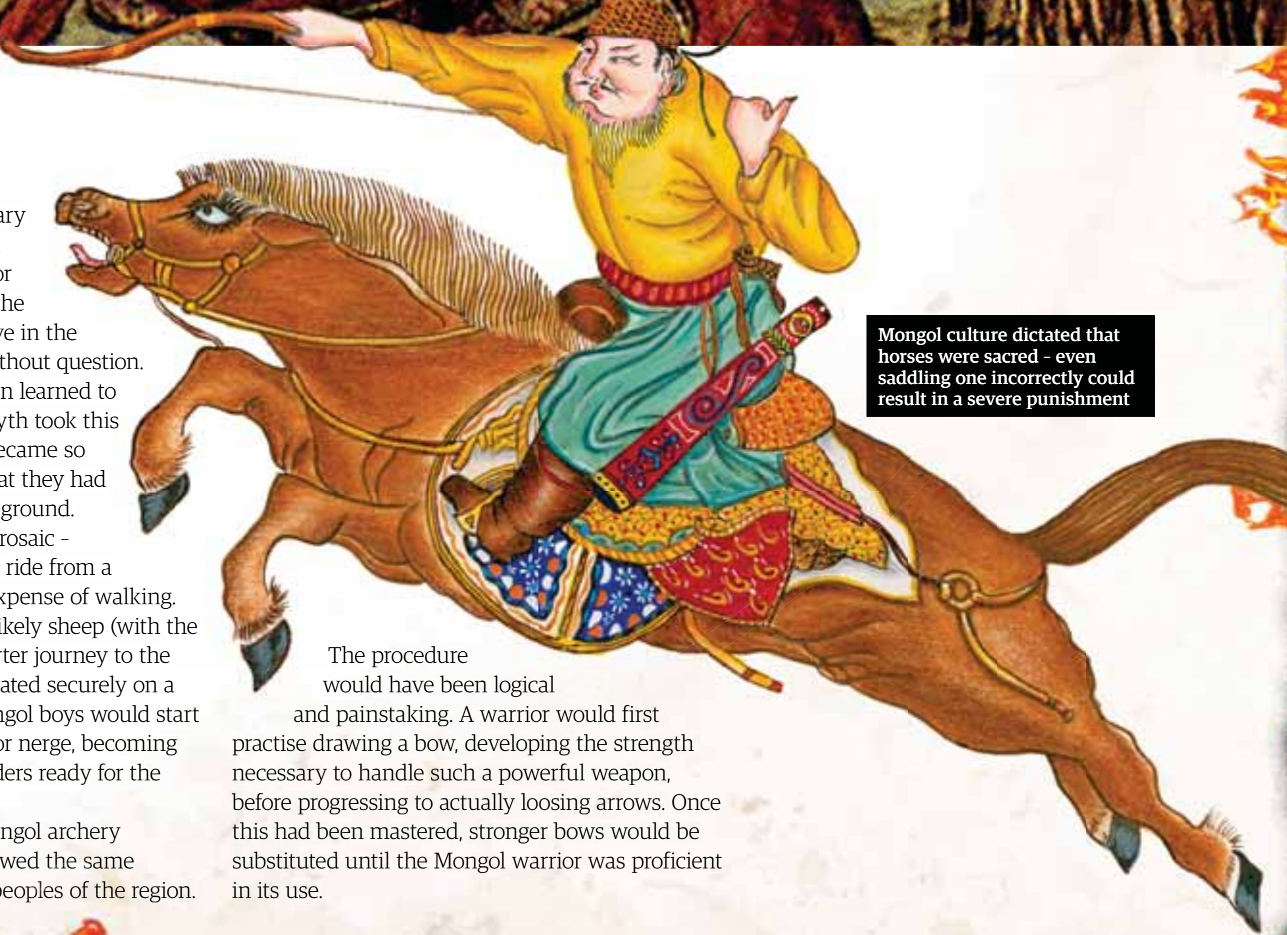
Subutai therefore did not have the traditional Mongol upbringing. His people rode reindeer rather than horses and lived in permanent villages rather than moving their herds around the vast steppes.

A blacksmith would have been valued by the Mongols, who had developed no technology of their own and so relied on foreign skills and materials to provide them with weapons. The young Subutai, however, had shown no inclination to take up his father's trade. Quite how he developed such a mastery of warfare, particularly on the steppe lands that were so alien to his native land, is impossible to know. It is likely that he had never even sat on a horse when he joined the small army of Temüjin (Genghis Khan's original name).

It seems likely that Subutai was simply a natural when it came to tactical and strategic thinking, and he had a gift for employing that thinking on a vast scale. Allied with this was a willingness to absorb technology and ideas from others. This was most notable in his use of siege weaponry and his willingness to employ it on the battlefield (it was Subutai's idea to implement the rolling barrage that cleared the bridge over the Sajó at the Battle of Mohi in 1241).

As well as natural ability, however, Subutai was the beneficiary of a remarkable form of military training. As a young man he acted as 'doorkeeper of the tent' for Temüjin as he built his power base in the last decade of the 12th century. Thanks to this privileged position, he would have been able to listen in on countless councils of war, learning how generals thought and planned and no doubt making his own mind up about what was and wasn't effective.

Subutai's crowning glory was his majestic plan to invade Eastern Europe, splitting the Mongol army across a vast front while continuing to maintain effective communications between the different corps. It was warfare on a scale the Europeans had never seen before, and they were completely unable to counter it.



Skills

The life of a Mongol tribesman was an extended form of military training. In fact, the Mongolian language has no native word for 'soldier' - almost all men over the age of 15 were expected to serve in the armed forces if called upon, without question.

Legend tells that Mongol men learned to ride before they could walk. Myth took this further, suggesting that they became so used to riding on horseback that they had great difficulty walking on the ground.

The truth was rather more prosaic - children were indeed taught to ride from a very early age, but not at the expense of walking. Their first mounts were most likely sheep (with the obvious benefit of a much shorter journey to the ground if they fell off). Once seated securely on a horse, however, the young Mongol boys would start to learn the skills of the hunt, or nerge, becoming expert bowmen and tireless riders ready for the wars ahead.

Little is known of formal Mongol archery training, but it most likely followed the same principles employed by other peoples of the region. The procedure would have been logical and painstaking. A warrior would first practise drawing a bow, developing the strength necessary to handle such a powerful weapon, before progressing to actually loosing arrows. Once this had been mastered, stronger bows would be substituted until the Mongol warrior was proficient in its use.

Mongol culture dictated that horses were sacred - even saddling one incorrectly could result in a severe punishment

Images: Getty Images (skills); Alamy (main); Ubisoft (Subutai)

Strategy

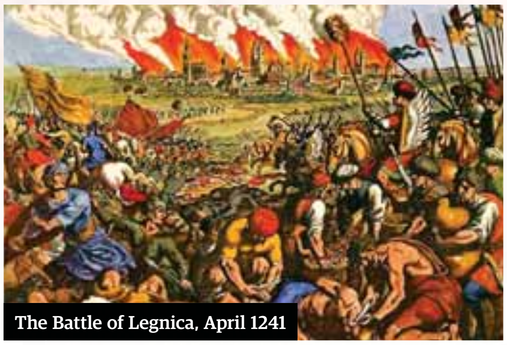
There was little strategy in early Mongolian expeditions. Seeing wealthy neighbours as little more than supply stations to be plundered at will, the Mongols had no interest in actually conquering another nation.

This changed, for unknown reasons, during a raid into China in 1211, when Jin forces fielded a large army to resist the Mongols' predations. Genghis Khan, faced with this 70,000-strong army, could have simply withdrawn into his homelands as countless raiding expeditions before had done, but on this occasion he chose battle and annihilated the Jin force.

Any thoughts of complete conquest were still hampered by the Mongols' inability to cope with large, fortified cities, but this gradually changed as expertise and equipment was absorbed from Jin territory. Eventually, the Mongols developed excellent siege tactics, which in turn allowed them to take on larger strategic goals.

During the campaign against Hungary, which started in 1241, the Mongols were able to split their army across a front of more than 1,000 kilometres while retaining cohesion and co-operation. The dispersal of force (including a diversionary thrust into Poland) allowed the Mongols to keep potential reinforcements from coming to the aid of the primary target.

Such large-scale, co-ordinated movements required high levels of organisation, and this was where Mongol training and discipline came into play. The army was split into units of ten, 100, 1,000 and 10,000, and a sophisticated and well-drilled system of flags, torches and messengers would ensure that communication between the units was continuous.


The Battle of Legnica, April 1241

This was perhaps the biggest advantage enjoyed by the Mongols during their invasion of Europe. European military organisation was rudimentary at best, with the key element, the mounted knights, more adept at individualistic skills. There was no command and control system to bring a force together as a unified whole, and this made them extremely vulnerable to the tactics employed by the Mongols. The situation was worsened by the nature of the European armies that faced the Mongols, riven as they often were by personal feuds and political divisions.

> "The Mongols were able to split their army across a front of more than 1,000 kilometres"

Weapons

The Mongols' most famed weapon was the bow, but their arsenal was varied and expanded steadily during their ascendancy. Just as the Mongols were willing to take on foreign knowledge and expertise (as in the case of siegecraft) they were also happy to adopt foreign weaponry.

Not only did they take on weapons such as catapults from China and other artillery from Persia, they were able to adapt them to their needs. Combining elements of both Chinese and Persian designs, the Mongols developed a catapult with a range of 350 metres. Explosives, naphtha and rocks would all be used as ammunition, and at the Sajó River in Hungary in 1241, the Mongols were able to employ a rolling barrage of artillery fire to enable them to cross a narrow bridge to get at the main army of King Béla IV.

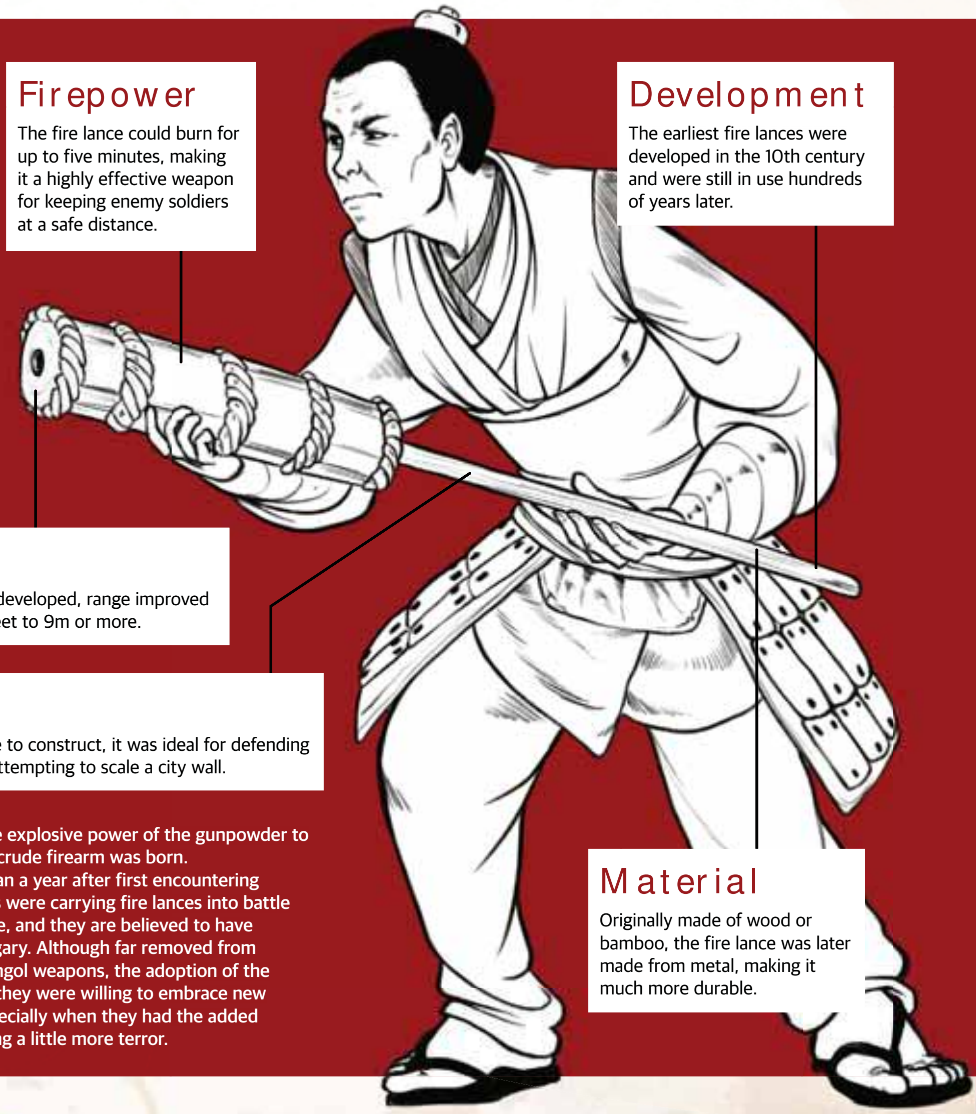
FIRE LANCE

The fire lance, the precursor of the gun, was a perfect example of the Mongols' willingness to adopt foreign technology. At the Siege of Kaifeng in 1232, the city had been terrified by this strange weapon, which spouted fire up to nine metres from the end of a spear. Invented by the Chinese, it was originally a form of flamethrower, able to keep an enemy at a distance, but it also had a significant psychological impact upon enemy soldiers, especially those who had never seen one before.

Initially, it was little more than a Roman candle-style firework constructed of bamboo or even paper and attached to a spear (once the fire had burnt out, the lance could be quickly converted back into a regular spear or pike). As it developed, however, the principle elements of what would later become firearms appeared, including the replacement of the bamboo barrel with one made of metal, which could withstand the use of more powerful gunpowder.

The lance was also able to be stuffed with pieces of stone or scraps of metal, which could then be hurled from the end at the enemy like primitive bullets. With the realisation that larger projectiles – which fit snugly into the barrel of the fire lance – would enable more of the explosive power of the gunpowder to hurl them forth, a crude firearm was born.

By 1233, less than a year after first encountering them, the Mongols were carrying fire lances into battle against the Chinese, and they are believed to have used them in Hungary. Although far removed from the traditional Mongol weapons, the adoption of the fire lance showed they were willing to embrace new technologies – especially when they had the added benefit of spreading a little more terror.



Firepower

The fire lance could burn for up to five minutes, making it a highly effective weapon for keeping enemy soldiers at a safe distance.

Development

The earliest fire lances were developed in the 10th century and were still in use hundreds of years later.

Range

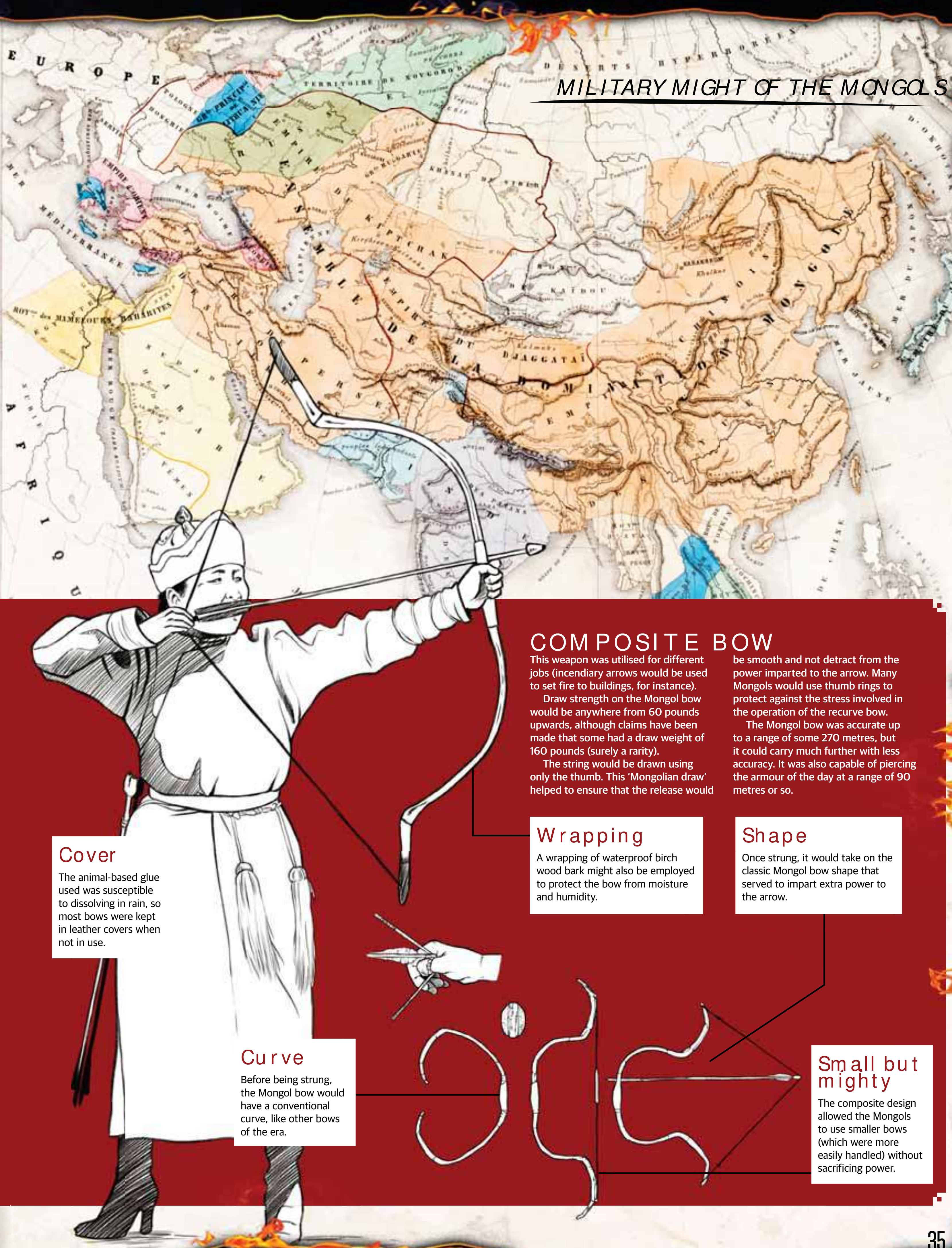
As the fire lance developed, range improved from just a few feet to 9m or more.

Uses

Cheap and simple to construct, it was ideal for defending against soldiers attempting to scale a city wall.

Material

Originally made of wood or bamboo, the fire lance was later made from metal, making it much more durable.


EUROPE
MER MÉDITERRANÉE
AFRIQUE
MER ROUGE
ARABIE
MER CASPIENNE
EMPIRE DU KIPTCHAK
EMPIRE DE DJAGGATAI
EMPIRE MONGOL
MER JAUNE
JAPON
DÉSERTS HYPERBORÉENS
TERRITOIRE DE NOVGOROD

COMPOSITE BOW

This weapon was utilised for different jobs (incendiary arrows would be used to set fire to buildings, for instance).

Draw strength on the Mongol bow would be anywhere from 60 pounds upwards, although claims have been made that some had a draw weight of 160 pounds (surely a rarity).

The string would be drawn using only the thumb. This 'Mongolian draw' helped to ensure that the release would be smooth and not detract from the power imparted to the arrow. Many Mongols would use thumb rings to protect against the stress involved in the operation of the recurve bow.

The Mongol bow was accurate up to a range of some 270 metres, but it could carry much further with less accuracy. It was also capable of piercing the armour of the day at a range of 90 metres or so.

Wrapping

A wrapping of waterproof birch wood bark might also be employed to protect the bow from moisture and humidity.

Shape

Once strung, it would take on the classic Mongol bow shape that served to impart extra power to the arrow.

Cover

The animal-based glue used was susceptible to dissolving in rain, so most bows were kept in leather covers when not in use.

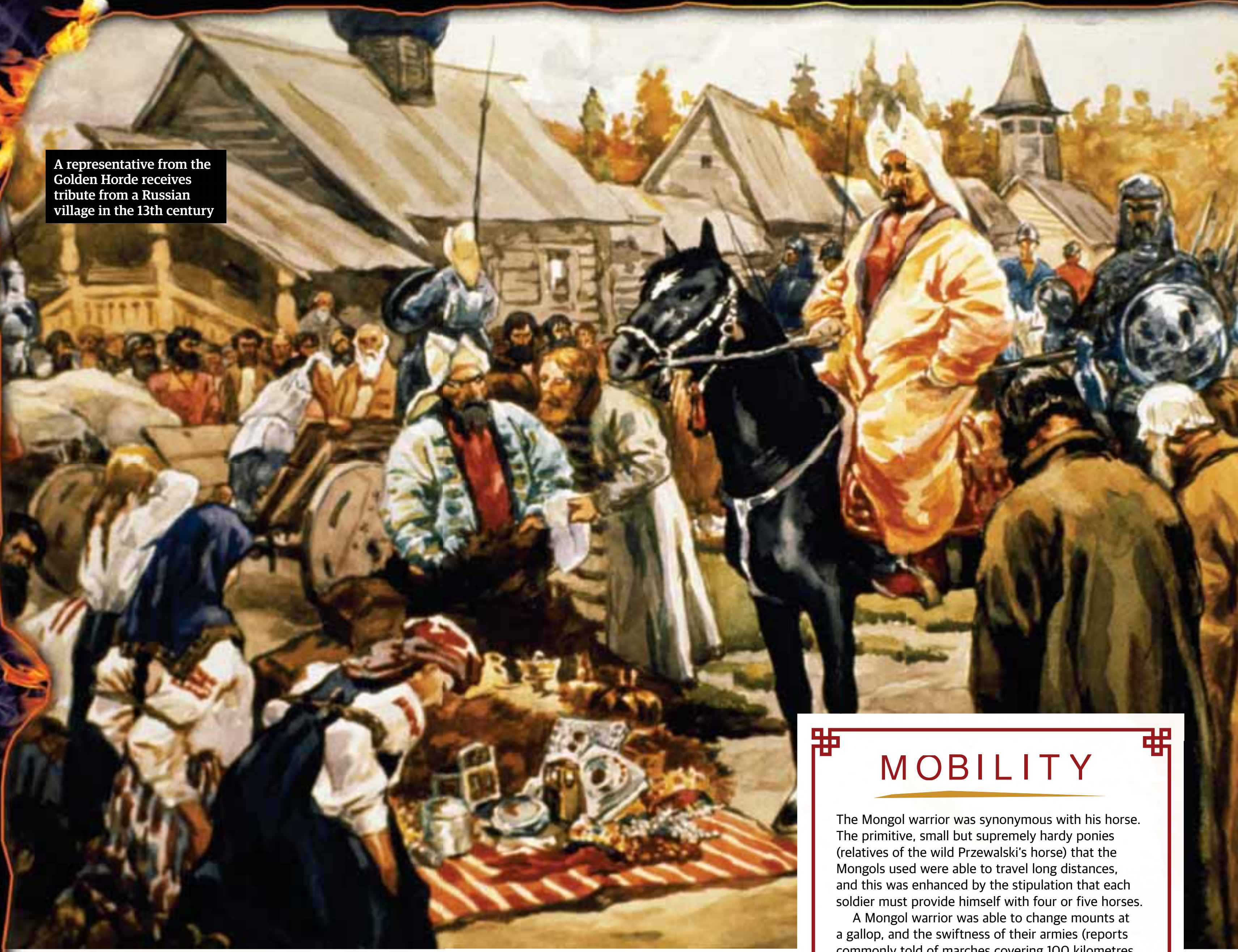
Curve

Before being strung, the Mongol bow would have a conventional curve, like other bows of the era.

Small but mighty

The composite design allowed the Mongols to use smaller bows (which were more easily handled) without sacrificing power.

Images: Alamy (map); Rebekka Hearl (illustrations)



A representative from the Golden Horde receives tribute from a Russian village in the 13th century

Discipline

The skills, training and weaponry of the Mongols would have counted for little were it not for their remarkable discipline. This has often been considered the result of a system of draconian punishments, which certainly played its part. The price for failure in the Mongol army could be high.

Genghis Khan had set the standard when he stated simply that, "If you are obedient to my mandates, it behoveth that, if I should command the sons to slay the father, you should all obey."

Punishment for disobedience could include flogging or even death for particularly serious offences. The Mongols were especially serious about preventing looting before a battle had been won, and any man caught in the act would be summarily executed. This was not out of any distaste for looting itself - rather it was an attempt to keep the army focused on its goal of winning the battle. There would be ample time for looting later.

Discipline was even meted out to entire units. If a group of men from an arban (ten soldiers) fled from a battle, they all faced execution. Although severe, this sort of code helped to ensure units acted together, key to success on the battlefield.

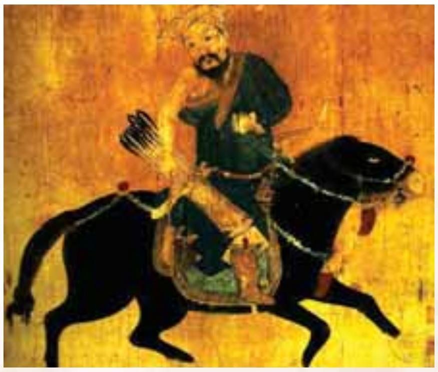
"The mongols were especially serious about preventing looting before a battle had been won, and any man caught in the act would be executed"

MOBILITY

The Mongol warrior was synonymous with his horse. The primitive, small but supremely hardy ponies (relatives of the wild Przewalski's horse) that the Mongols used were able to travel long distances, and this was enhanced by the stipulation that each soldier must provide himself with four or five horses.

A Mongol warrior was able to change mounts at a gallop, and the swiftness of their armies (reports commonly told of marches covering 100 kilometres in a single day) completely befuddled their European opponents, who believed they must have been facing armies of five or six times their actual number.

Mobility of a different sort was maintained by the light armour worn by the Mongol light cavalrymen. The silk undershirt (the Mongols were unable to produce their own silk, so they traded for it or simply looted it from the Chinese) was reckoned to offer some protection against arrow wounds, making the barbs easier to withdraw. The undershirt also maintained flexibility, allowing the Mongol warrior to perform the 'Parthian shot', in which he would gallop full tilt away from an enemy while turning back in his saddle to fire an arrow.



Tactics of terror

INSTILLING FEAR IN THE ENEMY WAS NOT MERELY THE BY-PRODUCT OF MONGOL TACTICS – IT WAS A KEYSTONE OF THEIR ENTIRE STRATEGY

Psychological warfare was a key tactic employed by the Mongols. It is easy to characterise their treatment of captured civilians and enemy soldiers as mere barbarity (and it was undeniably brutal), but there was actually a definite purpose behind it.

By creating a terrifying image of themselves, the Mongols made it more likely that any city they approached might surrender without putting up resistance. It also made it more likely that an area would remain submissive after Mongol forces had left - this was hugely important, as the invading force did not have enough men to leave garrisons.

For this reason, civilians in a captured city that had offered resistance would be systematically slaughtered or taken into slavery. A small proportion of the population would be allowed to go free, however, in order to spread the word of the ferocity of the Mongols and the futility of resistance. When the city of Bukhara was taken during the Mongol conquest of Khwarezmia, several thousand people were freed, but only after witnessing the execution of 30,000 of their fellow citizens.

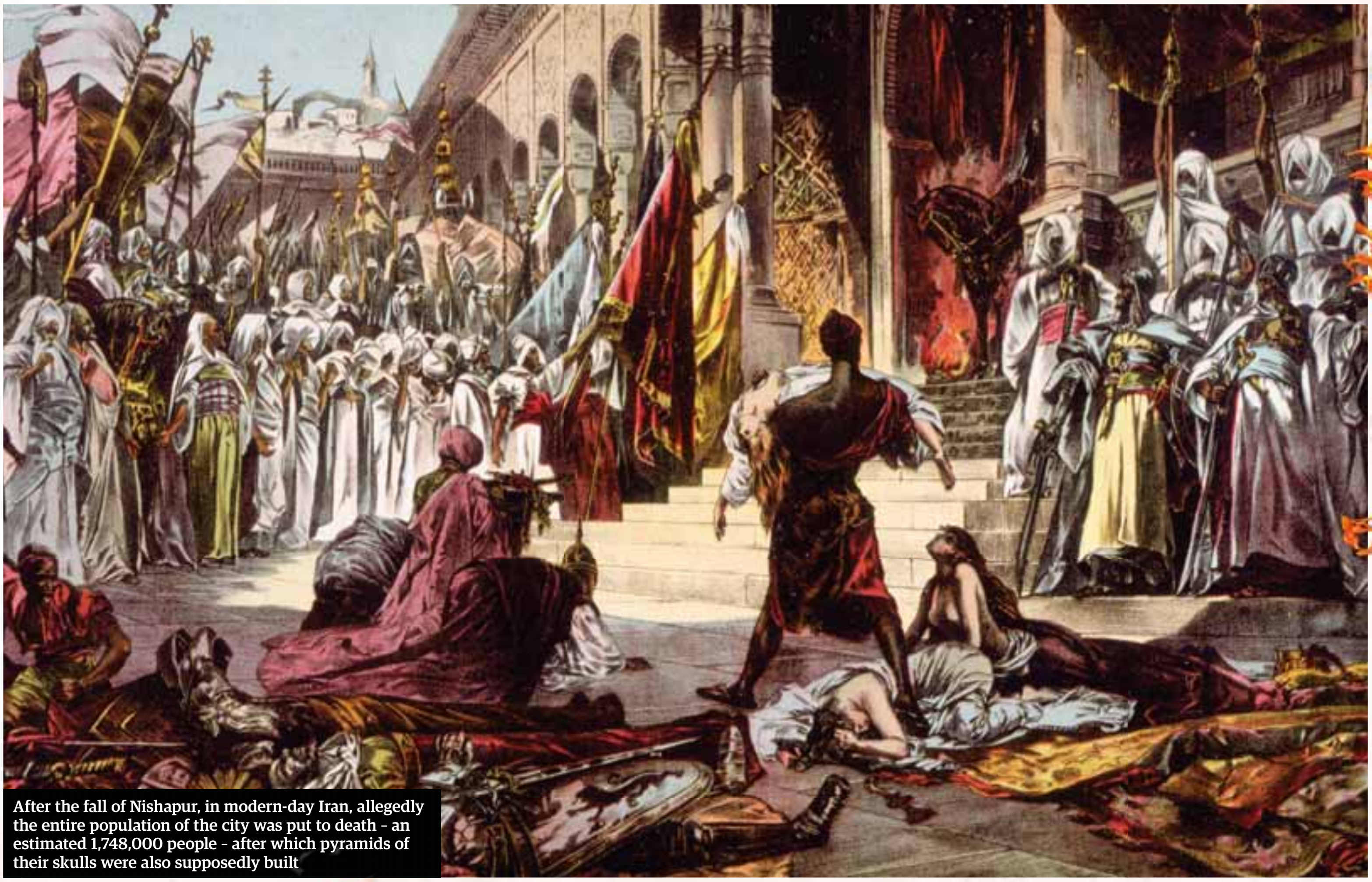
In battle, the Mongols would sometimes make use of a tactic known as kharash, in which prisoners would be herded before the main army as they advanced into battle. More than a mere exercise in psychological warfare, the prisoners would act as a human shield, taking the brunt of the enemy's defensive fire. The use of explosives and burning tar in artillery barrages was also as much intended to spread fear and chaos in enemy ranks as it was to do any genuine damage.

Because of the fearsome image the Mongols carefully crafted, many cities and even whole tribes submitted without resistance. The Mongols would always accept this gladly - it was far easier than having to conquer a foe, and treating those who submitted with the same harshness as those who resisted would undermine the effects of their psychological warfare campaign.

Even so, the Mongols' terror tactics sometimes worked against them, especially in Europe, where their already terrifying reputation was enhanced with all manner of fanciful embellishments. The Mongols were even professed by some to be the descendants of Gog and Magog, a pair of man-eating giants who had terrorised the world in ancient times.

Facing up to such inhuman opposition convinced many that no mercy could be expected from the Mongols, even if instant submission was offered, resulting in some ferocious fights to the death.

> "Civilians in a captured city that had offered resistance would be systematically slaughtered or taken into slavery"

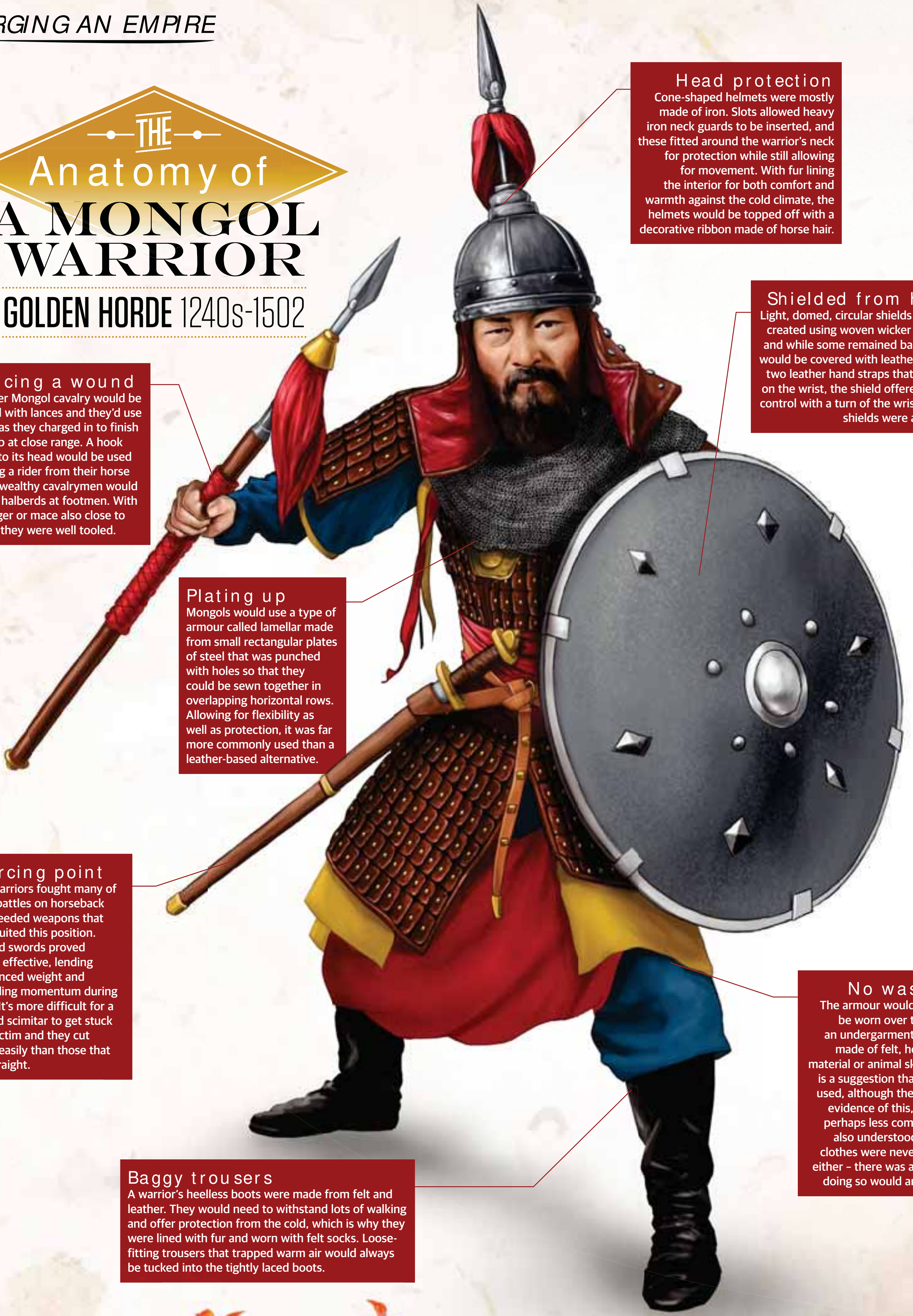


After the fall of Nishapur, in modern-day Iran, allegedly the entire population of the city was put to death - an estimated 1,748,000 people - after which pyramids of their skulls were also supposedly built

Images: Getty Images

THE Anatomy of A MONGOL WARRIOR

GOLDEN HORDE 1240s-1502



Head protection

Cone-shaped helmets were mostly made of iron. Slots allowed heavy iron neck guards to be inserted, and these fitted around the warrior's neck for protection while still allowing for movement. With fur lining the interior for both comfort and warmth against the cold climate, the helmets would be topped off with a decorative ribbon made of horse hair.

Lancing a wound

Heavier Mongol cavalry would be armed with lances and they'd use them as they charged in to finish the job at close range. A hook close to its head would be used to drag a rider from their horse while wealthy cavalrymen would swing halberds at footmen. With a dagger or mace also close to hand, they were well tooled.

Shielded from harm

Light, domed, circular shields would be created using woven wicker or rattan, and while some remained bare, others would be covered with leather. Held by two leather hand straps that would fit on the wrist, the shield offered precise control with a turn of the wrist. Human shields were also used!

Plating up

Mongols would use a type of armour called lamellar made from small rectangular plates of steel that was punched with holes so that they could be sewn together in overlapping horizontal rows. Allowing for flexibility as well as protection, it was far more commonly used than a leather-based alternative.

Piercing point

The warriors fought many of their battles on horseback and needed weapons that best suited this position. Curved swords proved highly effective, lending a balanced weight and providing momentum during a kill. It's more difficult for a curved scimitar to get stuck in a victim and they cut more easily than those that are straight.

No washing

The armour would typically be worn over the top of an undergarment that was made of felt, hemp fibre material or animal skin. There is a suggestion that silk was used, although there is little evidence of this, so it was perhaps less common. It is also understood that the clothes were never washed either – there was a fear that doing so would anger God.

Baggy trousers

A warrior's heelless boots were made from felt and leather. They would need to withstand lots of walking and offer protection from the cold, which is why they were lined with fur and worn with felt socks. Loose-fitting trousers that trapped warm air would always be tucked into the tightly laced boots.

Illustration: Kevin McGivern

DISCOVER THE INCREDIBLE HISTORY OF THE LAND DOWN UNDER

From its rich Aboriginal history to its place on the world stage today, explore how Australia went from an Age of Exploration myth to a very real island continent with a unique and powerful story to tell

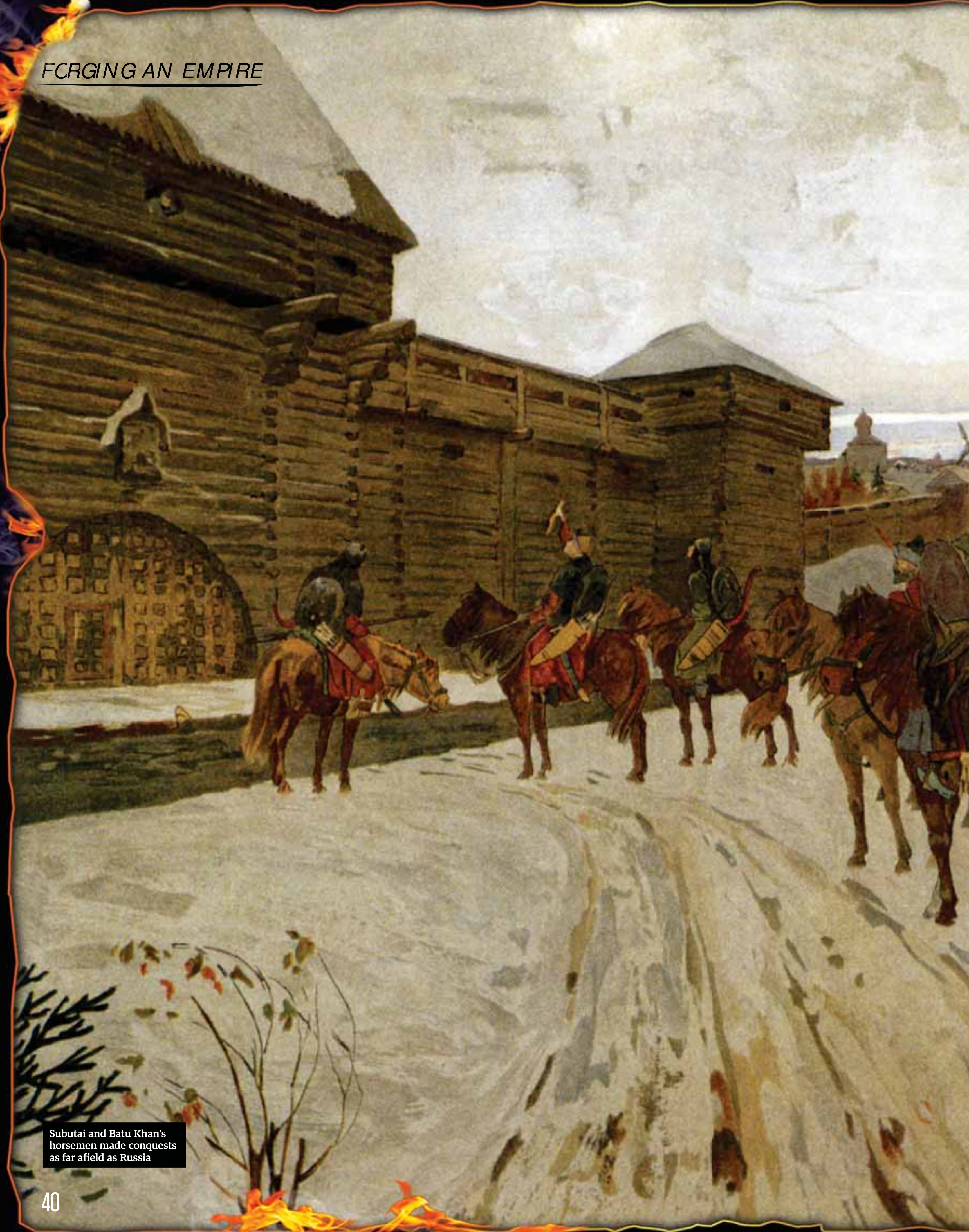
NEW
HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA
EXPLORE THE COMPLEX AND DRAMATIC STORY OF THE ISLAND CONTINENT AND ITS PEOPLE
FROM THE MAKERS OF ALL ABOUT HISTORY
All About History Book of Australia
ON SALE NOW

FUTURE

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents



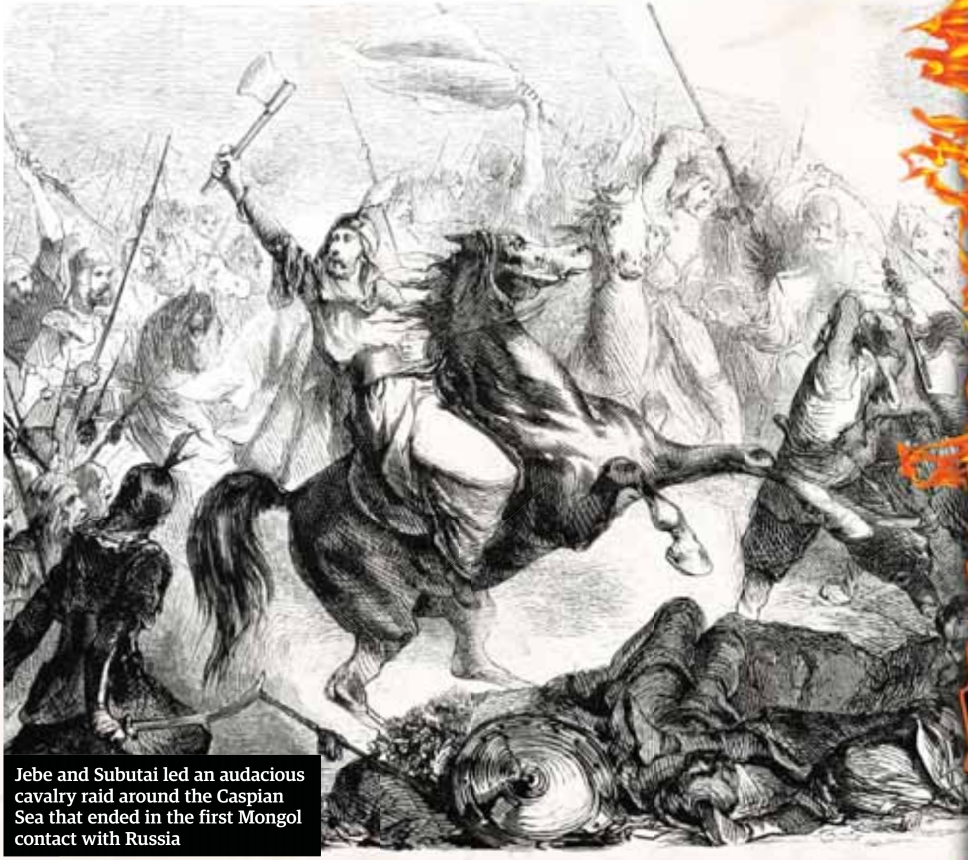
Subutai and Batu Khan's horsemen made conquests as far afield as Russia

DOGS of war

MEET THE GENERALS AND COMMANDERS WHO CRUSHED ASIA ON BEHALF OF THE GREAT KHANS

Written by Scott Reeves

As the Mongol horde swept across Asia, one near-contemporary historian described the generals at their head as 'dogs'. There's little doubt that Genghis Khan was a military mastermind, but he and his successors would have been unable to conquer such large swathes of territory without equally skilled subordinates. Some were trusted members of Genghis' family; others rose from humble origins and are proof that there was at least some meritocracy within the Mongol army. From the enemy who nearly killed Genghis Khan to the son who became his successor, it's time to meet the Mongol dogs of war.



Jebe and Subutai led an audacious cavalry raid around the Caspian Sea that ended in the first Mongol contact with Russia

Images: Getty Images (main)

A skilled archer, Jebe almost fatally wounded Genghis Khan with an arrow to the neck

Jebe

THE WOULD-BE KILLER WHO BECAME A TRUSTED GENERAL

History could have been very different if the Taichud warrior Zurgadai had taken a slightly different aim when firing an arrow at the Battle of the Thirteen Sides in 1201. Genghis Khan, who was still in the process of uniting the Mongol plains under one ruler, was wounded in the neck and could easily have been killed. Instead he lived, and Genghis spared the life of the archer, giving him the new name Jebe, meaning 'arrow', and allowing him to serve in his army.

Jebe repaid Genghis' benevolence by becoming one of his key generals, one who was particularly skilled in the use of cavalry. He commanded the left wing of the Mongol army as it invaded Jin China before turning back to conquer the troublesome Naiman tribe on the Mongolian steppe. Jebe was then tasked with defeating the Khwarezmian Empire in Persia with a young Subutai as his subordinate.

After harassing the land and capturing the capital, Samarkand, Jebe and Subutai undertook an audacious raid around the Caspian Sea, ravaging Persia and the kingdom of Georgia. Jebe died in 1223 on the return from this daring trip, having used the extra 22 years granted to him to serve loyally the man who spared his life.

MUQALI

THE CANNY LEADER WHO CONQUERED JIN CHINA

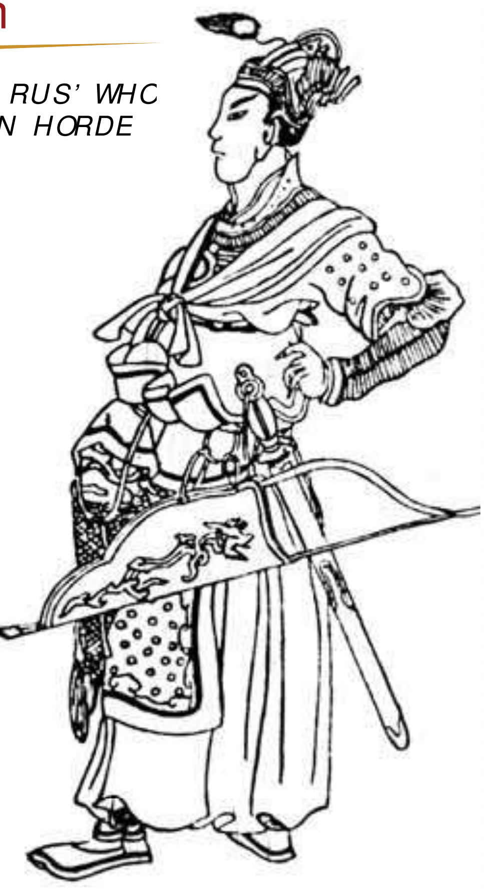
Muqali came into military service as a personal slave of Genghis Khan having been presented to the Mongol leader by his father in thanks for defeating the oppressive Jurkin tribe. Muqali proved himself a loyal and capable companion and was soon trusted with his own military command.

Victory over the Jin owed a great deal to Muqali, who was subordinate only to Genghis during the invasion. The vastly outnumbered Mongol army launched a surprise attack under Muqali that took a vital mountainous pass at Huan'erzui and pushed on to the main enemy camp before reinforcements could arrive. As the Jin collapsed, the Mongols advanced upon the Jin capital, Zhongdu (modern Beijing), which fell after a four-year siege.

Genghis returned to the west in 1218 with the bulk of his army, leaving Muqali as his viceroy in China and a small army of 20,000 to keep the peace. Yet Muqali did more than just defend the hard-fought conquests; he went on the offensive. He avoided pitched battles against the numerically superior enemy with clever manoeuvring, leaving the frustrated Jin to sulk behind their city walls. When besieged towns fell, Muqali broke with the typical Mongol approach of massacring the population and sought to convert foes to his cause, meaning he could keep his small army together rather than spread out in small garrisons. By the time Genghis returned in 1222, he was pleasantly surprised to find that Hebei, Shandong and Shaanxi had fallen to his troops, leaving only Hunan in Jin hands.

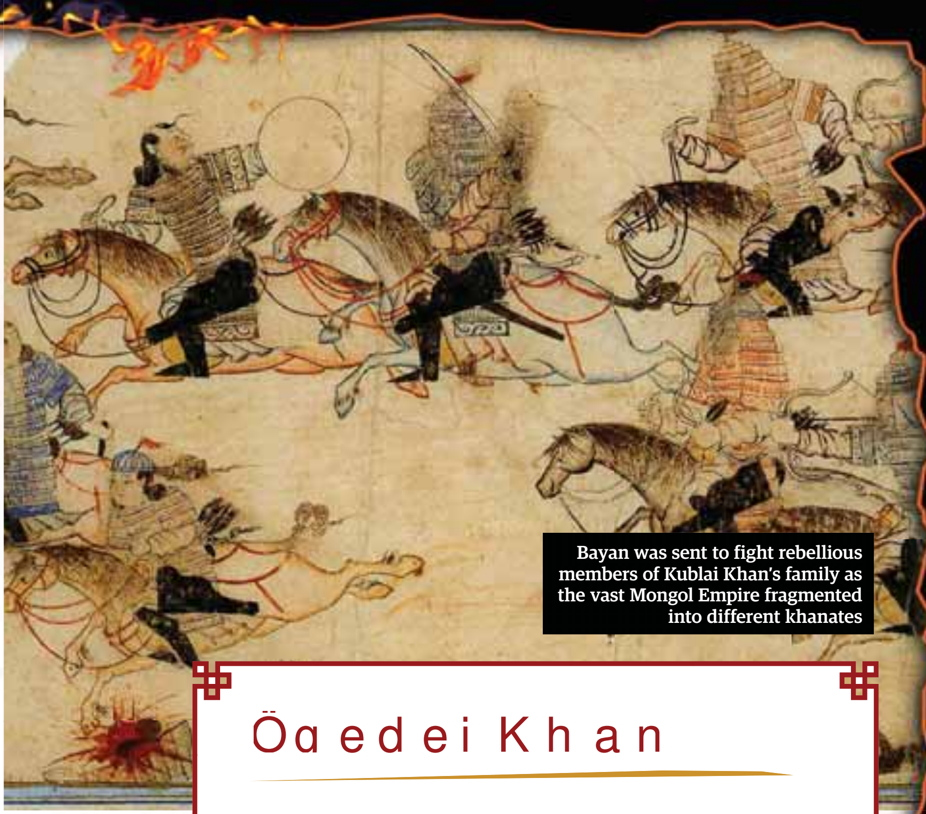
Batu Khan

THE SCOURGE OF THE RUS' WHO FOUNDED THE GOLDEN HORDE



A grandson of Genghis Khan – although the legitimacy of his father, Jochi, was called into question – Batu's military career took off after Jochi and Genghis died within six months of each other and Batu was granted some of his father's lands in the west. After participating in the conquest of the Jin, Ögedei requested that Batu return home and expand his territory into Rus'. Aided by Subutai and an army of 130,000 men, Batu's forces crossed the Volga River and spent the next two years vanquishing any opposition. However, the successful campaign soured when Batu fell out with Ögedei's son, Güyük, who was recalled to Mongolia.

Batu was reportedly not keen to withdraw from the thriving campaign in Eastern Europe after the death of Ögedei. He chose not to attend the council that appointed the new Great Khan – his rival Güyük got the nod – and stayed away a second time after Güyük died, this time supporting the claim of Möngke from afar. Although Batu was viewed as an elder statesman and had a reasonable claim to be Great Khan himself, he was satisfied with accepting the acquiescence of the Russian princes and carving out the northwest khanate that became known as the Golden Horde.



Bayan was sent to fight rebellious members of Kublai Khan's family as the vast Mongol Empire fragmented into different khanates

Bayan

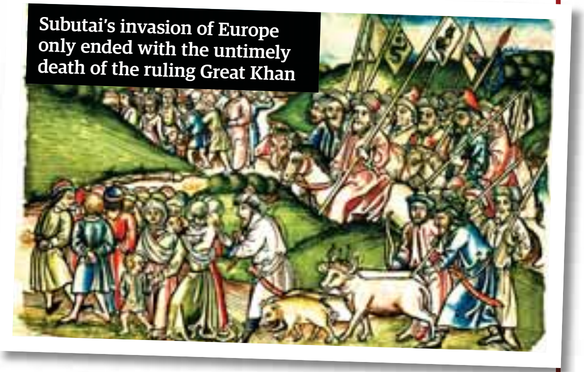
THE RUTHLESS NOBLE WHO DEFEATED SONG CHINA

Raised from noble stock – his grandfather was viceroy of Khwarezmia under Genghis Khan – Bayan's name meant 'rich', although Marco Polo called him 'Hundred Eyes' since his name sounded like that in Chinese. Having served time as a junior officer, Kublai Khan appointed Bayan as commander of the Yuan army just before the death of the Song Emperor Duzong in 1274 gave the Mongols an opportunity in the south. With a three year old now on the Song throne, Bayan led a bad-tempered invasion campaign down the Yangtze River, during which his troops slaughtered the population of Changzhou; the garrison at Changsha chose mass suicide rather than fall into Mongol hands; and the Song executed several Mongol envoys. Bayan's 200,000 soldiers slowly ground their way south, rejecting increasingly desperate attempts by the Song to sue for peace, eventually seizing the emperor and dowager empress from the capital, Hangzhou, and forcing their abdication.

Bayan was trusted enough to be sent to deal with the rebellion of Kaidu and Nayan, members of Kublai's own family who sought power. When Kublai sought an old companion while on his deathbed, the obvious choice was Bayan, the loyal general who had earned the emperor his most impressive victories in China.

SUBUTAI

THE NON-MONGOL WHO BECAME ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MILITARY CAMPAIGNERS IN HISTORY



Subutai's invasion of Europe only ended with the untimely death of the ruling Great Khan

The man who would go on to become one of the world's most successful generals was not born into the tribe he would eventually fight for. Subutai was the son of a blacksmith in the Siberian forest-dwelling Uriankhai clan but followed in the footsteps of his elder brother Jelme by enrolling in the fast-growing Mongol army.

Too young to be a fighter, Subutai was fortunate to be appointed door guard to Genghis Khan. There he learned horsemanship - something drilled into Mongols from an early age but an alien skill to a boy brought up in the forests - and quickly rose through the ranks after being deemed old enough to join in the Mongol conquests.

Given his first solo command after a few years shadowing his elders, Subutai was sent to apply the death blow to the hated Merkits in 1197 and helped to clear the Central Asian plateau of any remaining resistance to Mongol rule. In 1227 he was campaigning alongside Genghis when the Great Khan died during the fall of Yinchuan, the capital of Western Xia. Under his successor Ögedei, Subutai returned to China to complete the reconquest of the resurgent Jin.

Subutai was then despatched to the other side of the Mongol Empire, spending the next five years invading Rus' and Eastern Europe, systematically destroying Chernigov, Vladimir and Kiev before moving on to his most impressive victory. Commanding the central thrust of a split force, Subutai's army destroyed Hungarian opposition at the Battle of Mohi, giving the Mongols free reign over the country. The rest of Europe appeared ripe for the picking, only for Subutai to be recalled to Mongolia following the death of Ögedei to elect his successor.

Now around 70 years old, Subutai was still needed to expand the empire. He attacked the Song before being allowed to return home for a short retirement and peaceful death. Subutai won more than 65 battles in 20 campaigns that conquered or overran more territory than any other commander in history. Not bad for a blacksmith's son from the chilly north.

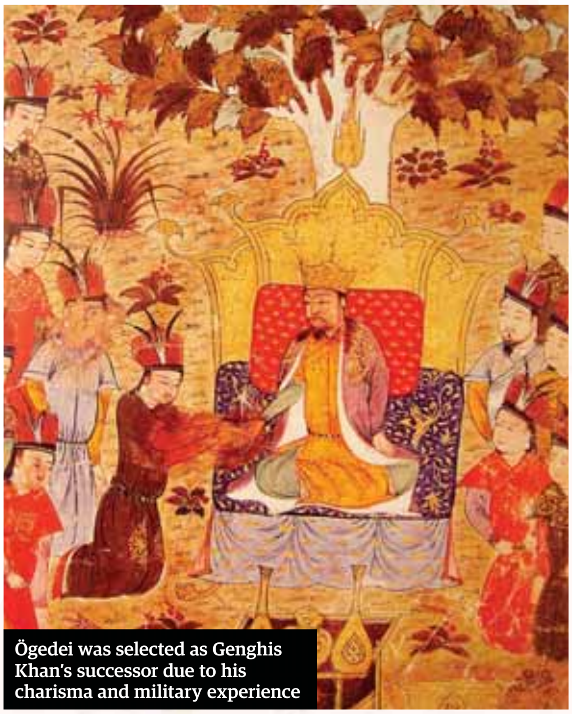
Ögedei Khan

THE CHARISMATIC SON WHO CONTINUED GENGHIS' WORK

Ögedei's military career had an inauspicious start. Wounded and lost at the Battle of Khalakhaljid Sands, the 17-year-old son of Genghis Khan had to be rescued from the battlefield by a member of his family. However, Ögedei recovered and began an ascent that saw him become Genghis' successor. He commanded troops against the Jin and was appointed to oversee the siege of Urgench in Persia when his two elder brothers, Jochi and Chagatai, quarrelled so much over the military strategy that they were unable to work together.

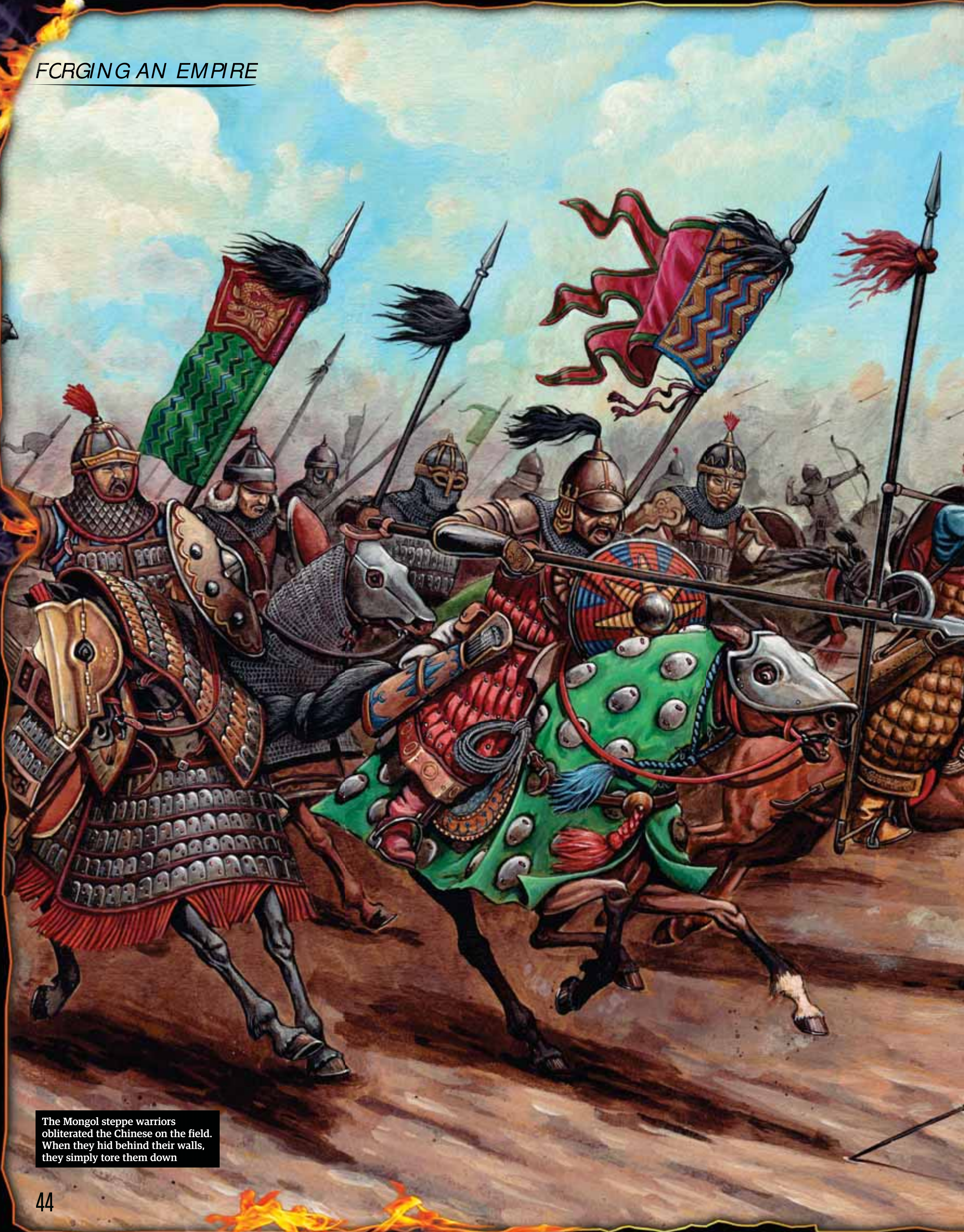
It was Ögedei's ability to unite and lead that caused Genghis to voice his hopes that his third son would succeed him; proof of Ögedei's charisma can be seen in the fact that Jochi and Chagatai supported the decision – although Jochi predeceased Genghis anyway.

After being elected Great Khan in 1229, Ögedei dictated strategy but mostly left battlefield command to his capable generals, allowing the Mongol Empire to expand on several fronts at the same time. The leader limited his personal campaigns to China and Central Asia, overseeing other conquests from the palace he built in the new capital, Karakorum. Aside from pushing back the frontiers against the Jin, Song and Rus', Ögedei's 12-year reign saw the Mongols invade Europe, India and Korea.



Ögedei was selected as Genghis Khan's successor due to his charisma and military experience

Images: Chinneeb CC BY-SA 3.0 (Muqali)



The Mongol steppe warriors obliterated the Chinese on the field. When they hid behind their walls, they simply tore them down

Conquering CHINA

THE 70-YEAR CAMPAIGN THAT TOPPLED THE GREATEST DYNASTIES OF THE EASTERN WORLD

Written by James Horton

In 1200 BCE mainland China was dominated by three primary powers. Oldest among these was the Song dynasty, which had once boasted dominion over a large bulk of China. The lands of the Song had since receded to the south, however, following the emergence of the Jurchen tribes of China's northeast. The Jurchen established their own dynasty - the Jin - early in the 12th century, which acted as a powerful counterweight to the Song.

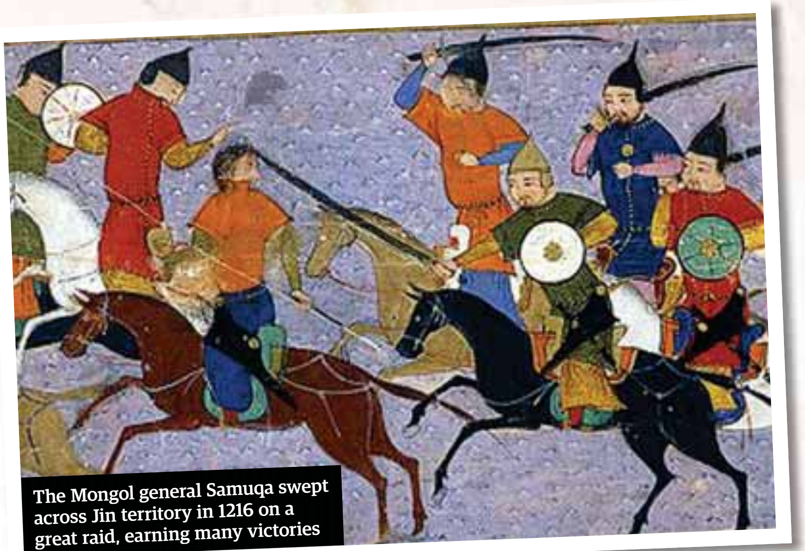
Eventually, the two fell into an equilibrium just south of China's massive Yellow River. The Song dominated south China and the Jin the north. Jin dominion stretched from China's border in the northeast to a region in the northwest, which was lorded over by their vassals, the Tangut. The Tangut had formed the Western Xia dynasty in the late 10th century within the pocket of the Gansu Corridor, which enjoyed excellent trade links. As such, despite being the smallest and weakest of the three powers, the Tangut were wealthy and boasted a competent military.

The Jin were not oblivious to their dangerous northern neighbours who occupied the steppe. The lands that would soon fall under sole rule of Genghis Khan represented a considerable threat to both the Tangut and Jin, whose lands bordered the nomads. Jin emperors exploited internal fighting between clans on the steppe to prevent unification of the nomadic warriors. Yet despite their best efforts, they could not prevent a Mongol from overcoming the odds, uniting the Mongol clans and ascending to the title of Genghis Khan in 1206. Genghis had no love for the Jin dynasty and knew that the only way to maintain his forces was foreign conquest. The writing was on the wall: the invasion of China was about to begin.

It was the inferior Tangut, not the Jin, who were the Mongols' first target. Genghis sent raids into the Tangut kingdom from 1205 to 1208 under the pretext of revenge, as the Tangut had previously briefly welcomed one of his steppe rivals into their territory. The Tangut opted to pay tribute to appease the Mongols but stopped in 1209, prompting Genghis to launch his first full-scale invasion into foreign lands.

His forces invaded Western Xia and stormed towards the Tangut city of Wu-la-hai. The Tangut mustered a force of 50,000 to stop them, but although they managed to gain the upper hand in a skirmish, the defenders were soon routed as things escalated into a pitched battle. The victorious Mongols then chopped their way through the city before marching south towards

Image: Shutterstock


The Mongol general Samuqa swept across Jin territory in 1216 on a great raid, earning many victories

the Tangut capital of Chung-Hsing. Between Genghis and the capital lay the Helan Mountains, where the Mongols came upon an imposing sight in the Kei Men fortress. The impassable fortification straddled the mountainous terrain and boasted a hefty garrison numbering in the tens of thousands behind its walls. In 1209, the Mongols were simply flummoxed by the idea of a serious siege. Kei Men's commander, Wei-Ming, repelled an initial Mongol assault, and being aware of the threat the steppe warriors posed in the open field, declined to leave his fortifications.

Genghis was forced to sit his army idly in front of the fortress for two months as he and his generals conceived a way to capture the walls. Eventually, he seemed to surrender the attempt, packing up his camp and marching his army away from the fortress in withdrawal, with his rearguard lagging behind. Wei-Ming sensed an opportunity to deliver a crushing blow on the retreating Mongols and rushed his forces from behind the walls, quickly driving them at the rearguard. Despite being initially confident of victory, it soon became apparent that the Tangut commander had fallen for Genghis' trap. As the two forces clashed, Mongol forces emerged from a sheltered hillside and engaged the Tangut rear, severing the army from the safety of its fortress. The Tangut were defeated, Wei-Ming was captured and the fortress of Kei Men surrendered shortly after the battle, allowing Genghis to continue.

The Mongols then plundered and pillaged their way to Chung-Hsing, but they were once more slowed to a grinding halt upon arrival at the capital. Equipped with defensive towers and high stone walls, the Mongols' amateur approach to siege warfare bore fruit. Unable to destroy or storm the walls, Genghis had his men turn to damming canals fed by the nearby Yellow River in an attempt to flood the city. However, the Mongols' engineering ability lagged behind the ingenuity of the idea, and the dam eventually broke. Instead of flooding the city, water rushed into the Mongol camp. Sodden and embarrassed, Genghis was forced to move his men further back from the city walls.

"Between Genghis and the capital lay the Helan Mountains, where the Mongols came upon an imposing sight"

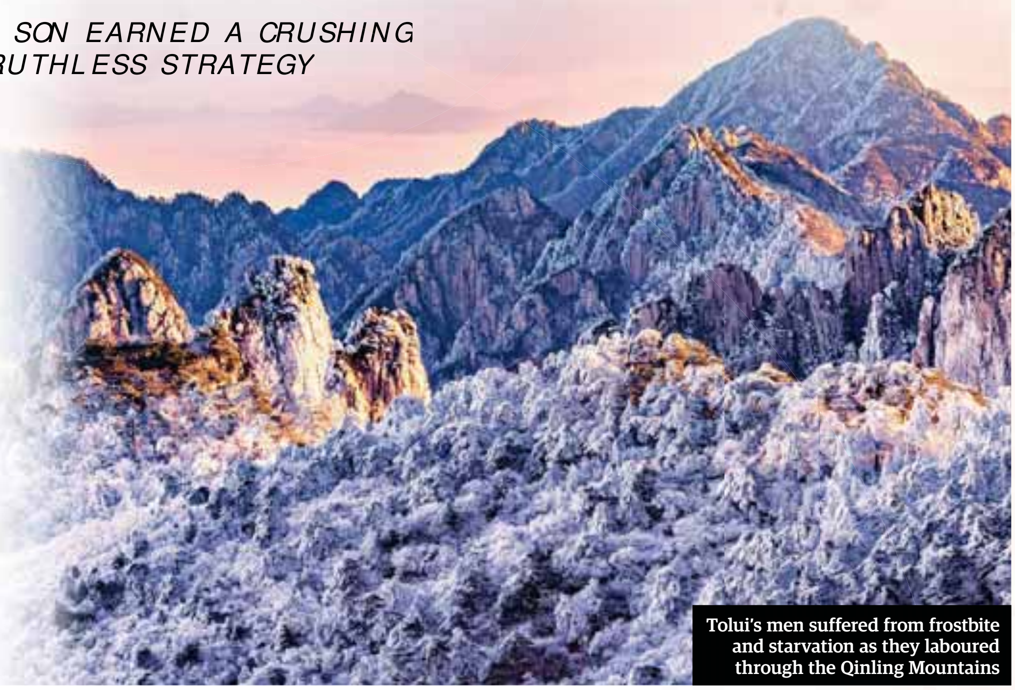
Tangut mausoleums, erected to entomb the Tangut kings, still rest at the base of the Helan Mountains

The journey of Tolui

HOW GENGHIS KHAN'S FOURTH SON EARNED A CRUSHING VICTORY THROUGH LUCK AND RUTHLESS STRATEGY

In 1231, Genghis Khan's fourth son, Tolui, had set off on an epic march to outflank his unsuspecting Chinese enemy – the Jin. Tolui marched 30,000 men into the freezing Qinling Mountains, forcing his army to suffer the hardships of the punishing cold with only meagre supplies of food. Yet they successfully emerged in December 1231 at the southern border of Jin territory. The Chinese army was startled to find a Mongol host emerging from the mountains and frantically called their armies from the north to face them. Tolui, unprepared for a pitched battle, was forced to withdraw with the Jin hot on his heels.

The winter weather came to Tolui's aid, as heavy rainfall reportedly disrupted the vision of the Chinese soldiers and allowed his force to avoid engagement. The Jin army doggedly chased the Mongols as the weather worsened and the rain became snow. Wanting to deteriorate his enemies' position yet further, Tolui ordered the destruction of all supplies in the mountain villages he passed, denying the enemy their resources. After four days of pursuit the Jin soldiers were low on both energy and morale, encouraging Tolui to turn and fight. The Mongols fell upon the exhausted Jin and inflicted heavy casualties on their pursuers, sending them into flight. Tolui was allowed to complete his journey uncontested and reconnect his forces with the general Subutai, whose army had been able to move south with little resistance thanks to Tolui.



Tolui's men suffered from frostbite and starvation as they laboured through the Qinling Mountains

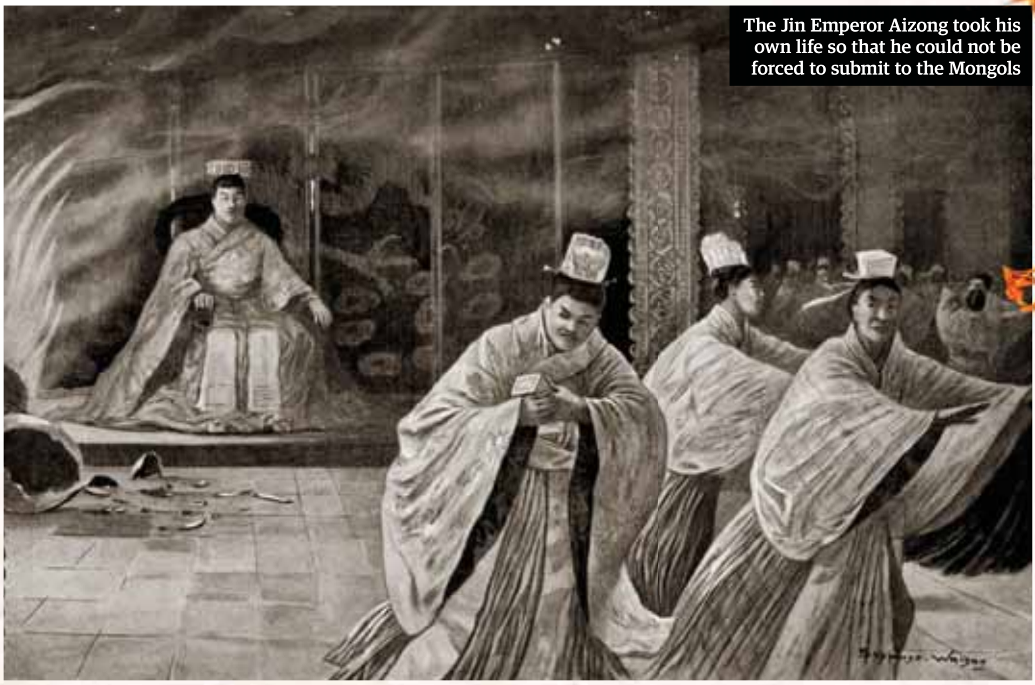
Despite this reprieve the situation inside the city continued to deteriorate. The Tangut king appealed to the neighbouring Jin dynasty for help, but the Jurchen failed to send military aid to their vassal. With his lands devastated, the Tangut king eventually capitulated and agreed to switch his allegiance to Genghis, offering a daughter in marriage and providing the invaders with a tribute of falcons, camels and textiles.

Genghis had achieved victory over the Tangut by January 1210, but he would lead another massive invading force into China by summer 1212. After raiding the border lands of Jin territory in 1211, Genghis marched his full force into their domain the following year. The campaign started well but was abruptly suspended after the Great Khan was struck in the leg by an arrow.

The Jin recaptured much of their lost territory as the Khan's forces fell back to their side of the border for the winter, but the horde would return the following spring. One of Genghis' famous generals, Muqali, captured the Jin's northern capital as the Khan's main force moved towards the central capital, Zhongdu. As the Mongol forces loomed on the horizon, the Jin emperor's court in Zhongdu became restless. The emperor was assassinated and a regency established in his place, but this regent was himself soon murdered. The whole affair achieved little but to weaken the fractured Jin yet further. With their enemy in disarray and the ruling court pinned within the walls of their capital, Genghis left a meagre force at the gates of the city and sent the rest of his forces across Jin territory to plunder.

The army reunified for a final siege of Zhongdu in spring 1214. Their new siege weapons successfully punctured the Jin capital's walls, but Genghis' men were unable to storm the breaches. The Jin ruling court, after ignoring the pleas of the Tangut just over four years prior, had found themselves in an almost identical position. Succumbing to the mounting pressure of the siege, the new emperor, Jin Xuanzong, surrendered in June, offering a bride to Genghis and paying tribute to the invaders in the form of jewellery, horses, slaves and silk.

Although the Jin had capitulated, the emperor had avoided relinquishing his official title in the peace talks. After the Mongols had returned north with their booty, Xuanzong wasted little time and swiftly moved his court south of the Yellow River to the city of Kaifeng, establishing it as his capital. This flight angered Genghis, who wheeled his army around and marched



The Jin Emperor Aizong took his own life so that he could not be forced to submit to the Mongols

Images: Getty Images (Aizong, Qin-ling mountains, Tangut mausoleums)

them back into Jin territory, returning there himself in 1215.

The former capital of Zhongdu did not escape the Mongols' wrath on their second invasion. This time the Chinese were patiently starved into submission, and Genghis' army unleashed their frustrations on the inhabitants once they surrendered. Rape, mass murder and all manner of brutalities were committed as the Mongols tore the city to pieces over the course of an entire month.

The Jin power base was swiftly collapsing, yet inexplicably they continued to wage war on multiple fronts. As they attempted to fight off the Mongols, they also made forays into southern Song territory. This is a testament to the deep well of manpower that was available to the Jin and their bitter rivalry with their southern neighbours. The Song, for their part, were happy for the Mongols to wage war on the Jin, the foreshadowing of the Tangut and Jin fates somehow not making an impression on them.

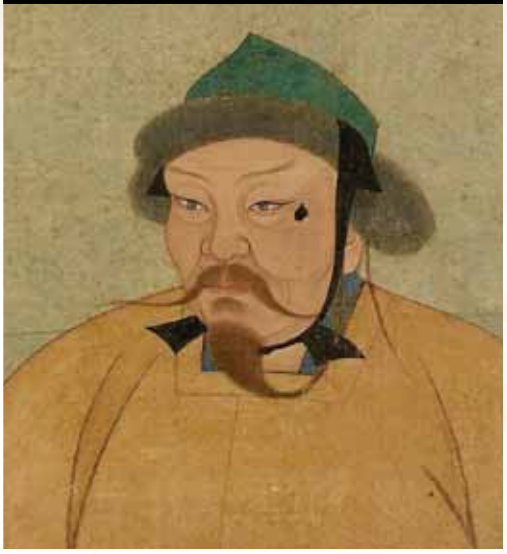
By 1217, Genghis Khan had been pulled away from China to fight elsewhere, leaving command in the hands of his general Muqali. From 1217 to 1223 Muqali led a combined force of Mongol cavalry, Khitan forces from China's northeast and Jurchen defectors against the Jin. Muqali was also relying on Tangut troops to bolster his forces. The Tangut were initially reluctant to send soldiers but agreed to do so after an angered raid committed by the Mongols. They served Muqali for well over half a decade as he engaged in a laboured offensive of sieges. By 1223, Muqali's forces had taken most Jin territories north of the Yellow River, but the death of a Tangut commander discouraged the Mongol vassals and they abandoned the campaign. Muqali died in the spring of 1223, and after some key cities south of the Yellow River were recaptured by the Jin they began peace talks with the Tangut and Song.

It may have appeared that peace was finally approaching mainland China, but Genghis would be back. The Great Khan was in his mid-60s by 1226 when the Mongols mustered a massive force to crush the rebellious Tangut once and for all. Genghis had recently fallen from his horse during a hunt, but the ageing conqueror endured to march his men into battle outside the Tangut capital. Genghis waited for the Yellow River to freeze before crossing with his army and smashing the Tangut forces, sealing their fate. This was the Great Khan's final military victory. Genghis died soon after the battle in 1227 – possibly from lingering damage from the horse fall – but his death was kept a secret while the siege of the capital was taking place. Once the city had submitted the Mongols ferociously ripped it to pieces and slaughtered the inhabitants, eradicating the Tangut state.

The Tangut territory was incorporated into the Mongol Empire, and it would fall to Genghis' third son Ögedei to bring the Jin to heel. Ögedei was around 40 years old when he was named Great Khan, and along with his brothers he enjoyed personal dominion over a portion of Genghis' empire. Ögedei had inherited the conquered lands of China and sought to expand his personal

> "Rape, mass murder and all manner of brutalities were committed as the Mongols tore the city to pieces"

Ögedei assumed the role of Great Khan after Genghis died in 1227 and led the Mongols to victory over the Jin

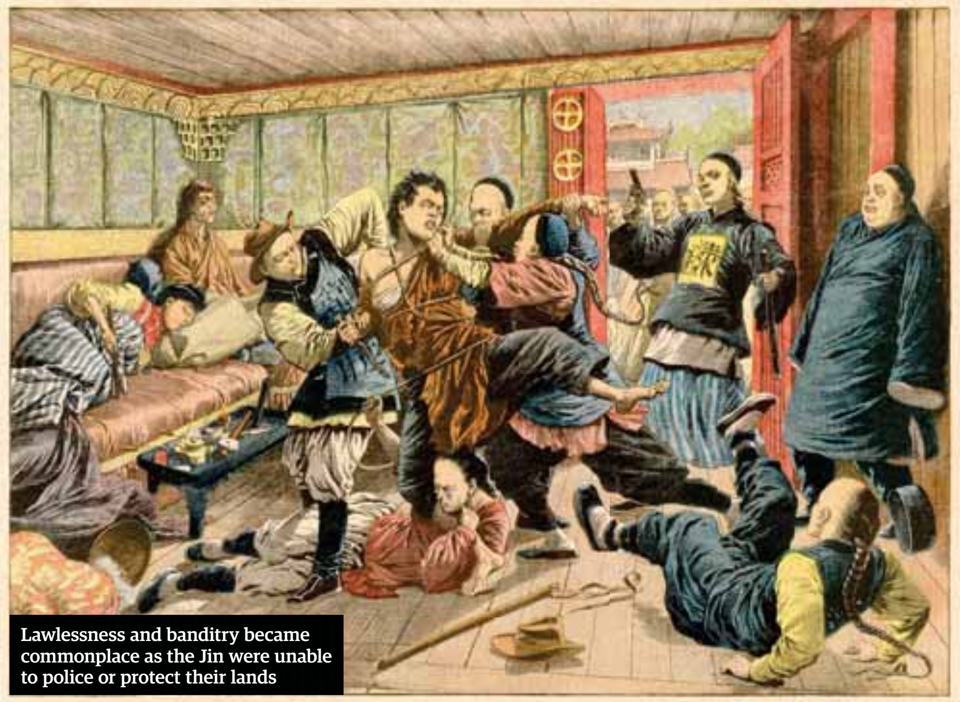


Red Coats

THE MILITIA OUTLAWS WHO ROSE FROM THE ASHES OF NORTHERN CHINA'S SCORCHED FIELDS TO CLAIM THEIR OWN TERRITORY

The war between Genghis Khan's Mongols and northern China's Jin dynasty across the 1210s and 1220s took a severe toll on the population, who found themselves the most brutally punished party of the protracted war. The Great Khan's armies wreaked havoc on their homes, striking fear into the peasantry and townsfolk who recoiled in dismay at the rampaging hordes. As their lands descended into chaos and lawlessness took hold, some sensed which way the winds were blowing and cast their support behind the Mongols. Others opted to form local militias to protect their families, while some rose up in rebellion and formed their own independent forces.

One of the most famous of these were the Red Coats, who petitioned the neighbouring Song dynasty for supplies in exchange for their loyalty. The Song agreed to supply the militia, but although the red in their name matched the 'fire' colour of the Song court, the Red Coats were anything but subservient. Instead of acting at the behest of the Song, the Red Coats used their supplies to wrestle control of the Shandong Peninsula from the waning Jin. The Mongols had paved the way for the ascension of the bandit Red Coats, and it served them well. The rebels would prove a thorn in the Jin's side during the years between Genghis and his son Ögedei's invasions.



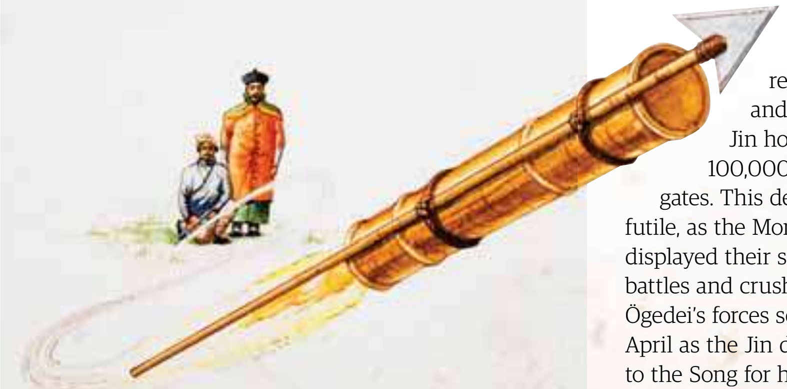
Lawlessness and banditry became commonplace as the Jin were unable to police or protect their lands

The Jin dynasty possessed considerable economic and military power before its destruction by the Mongols

territory, bringing his father's wish of a Mongol-ruled unified China closer to fruition.

Together with his younger brother Tolui and Genghis' long-serving and famous general Subutai – who had recently been campaigning on the fringes of Europe – Ögedei led his forces once more against the Jin in 1230. The Jin were still mostly hemmed in south of the Yellow River, but they had managed to recapture several towns in the interim years between major Mongol offences. Ögedei's forces first successfully besieged the stubborn city of Feng-Hsiang, which had been a thorn in Muqali's side during his years commanding the Mongol armies. Using a strategy favoured by his father, the new Khan next split his forces into three to march on the capital of Kaifeng from different directions.

The Mongol armies reunited in early 1232 and clashed with a massive Jin host numbering perhaps 100,000 outside Kaifeng's city gates. This defiant stand proved futile, as the Mongols once more displayed their superiority in pitched battles and crushed the opposition. Ögedei's forces settled into a siege in April as the Jin desperately pleaded to the Song for help. But as with the Tangut, the mutual distrust and dislike between the powers of China ran deep and the dynasties remained divided.



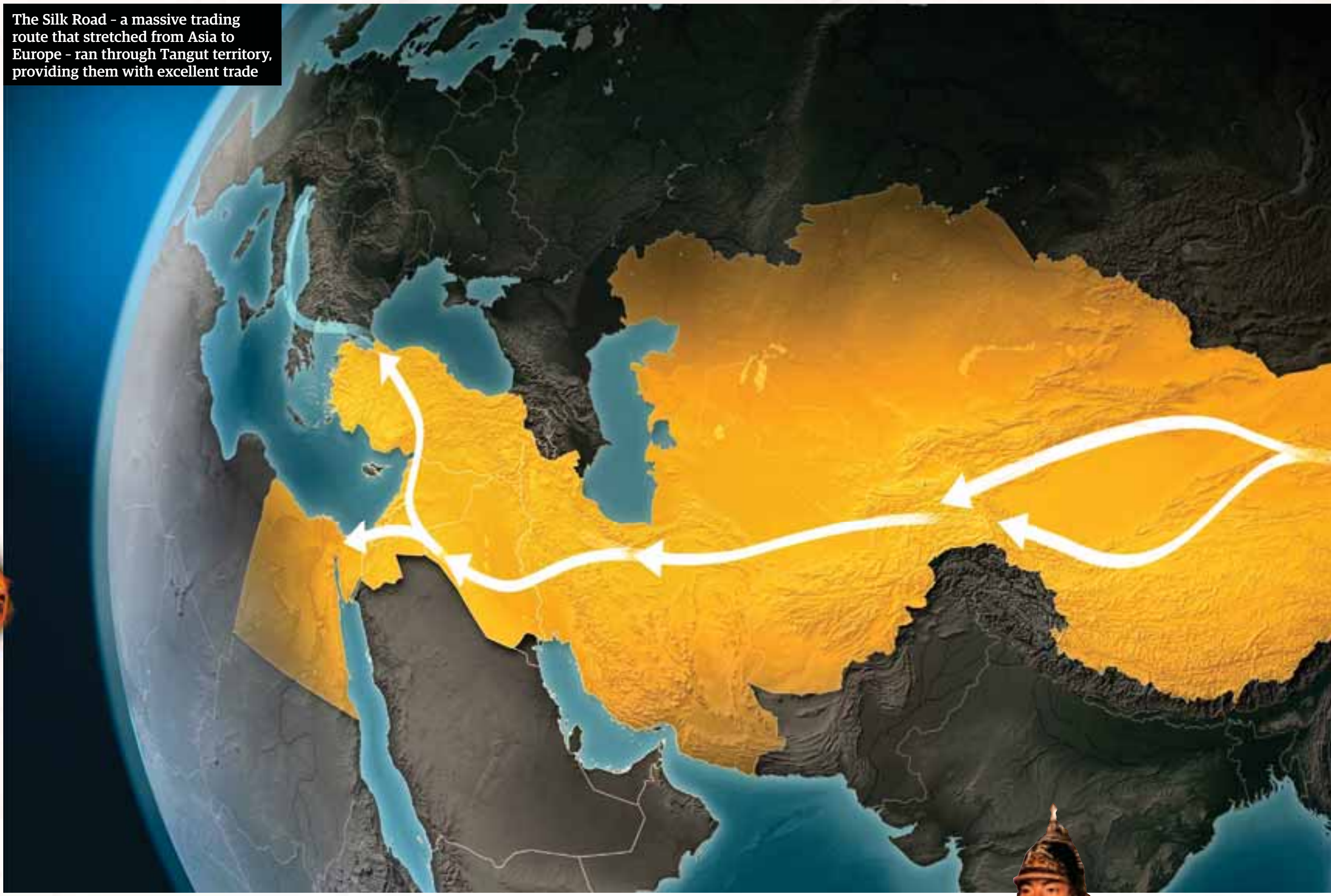
Gunpowder was used in many forms of weaponry, from fire arrows to fire lances to primitive explosives

Subutai was left in charge of the siege. He made an attempt at negotiating the city's surrender, but his envoys were killed. He was forced to attack the city, which proved especially difficult as the Jin employed gunpowder weapons. Gunpowder was not a new invention, but its use in firearm precursors and in primitive explosives was novel to the Mongols.

The Jurchen soldiers employed weapons known as 'fire lances', which resembled spears with an additional tubing attached to them. The tube could be stuffed with gunpowder and ignited, sending flames spewing outward over a few metres. Yet more dangerous were the primitive bombs that exploded after being ignited by a fuse. The Jin soldiers tossed these over the battlements and lowered them on chains into sheltered trenches dug by the Mongols. The explosions tore the enemy soldiers to pieces and set the ground ablaze, teaching the Mongols a harsh lesson about the potential devastation and usefulness of gunpowder weapons.

Subutai kept applying pressure on the Kaifeng defences, and towards the end of the summer plague broke out in the city. Sensing all was

Images: Alamy (Red Coats); Getty Images (Jin dynasty, gunpowder)

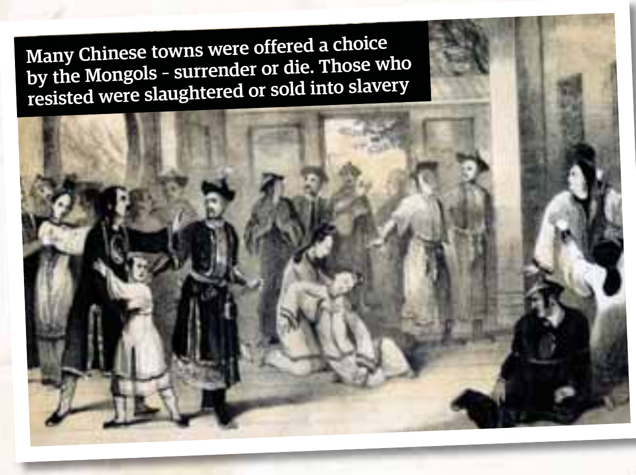


The Silk Road - a massive trading route that stretched from Asia to Europe - ran through Tangut territory, providing them with excellent trade

lost, the emperor and his entourage fled and attempted to establish a new capital elsewhere. Abandoned by their ruler, the defenders lost heart, and before long they surrendered to the Mongols. The forces of Kaifeng showered Subutai and his army with gifts and tribute in an effort to save the population, which yielded the desired effect. The Mongols plundered, but they refrained from sacking the city, much to the population's relief.

The Jin were stubborn in relinquishing power, though, and still held hope of restoring their fortunes from yet another new capital. However, this was not to be, as the Song dynasty made a deal with the Mongols to send an additional 20,000 troops as reinforcements to help destroy their old foe. The last Jin holdout was taken in February 1234, with the emperor opting to hang himself rather than fall prey to the Mongols. Ögedei absorbed the Jin territory into his domain, completing the conquest of northern China. The Great Khan likely harboured ambitions to begin an invasion against the Song in the near future, but bizarrely it was the southern Chinese dynasty who tossed the fledgling niceties between the two empires aside first.

Later in 1234, the Song launched a surprise attack into Ögedei's domain, capturing Kaifeng. The former capital of the Jin had once been the nexus of the Song Empire, and they were probably glad to have it back in their hands. However, this feeling of



Many Chinese towns were offered a choice by the Mongols - surrender or die. Those who resisted were slaughtered or sold into slavery

Genghis Khan's fourth son, Tolui, helped his brother Ögedei depose the Jin dynasty

elation didn't last long, as the Mongols promptly recaptured the city. The provocative actions of the Song may appear brazen given that over the past 25 years the Mongols had annihilated the Tangut and destroyed the Jin, but they initially appeared justified in their belief that they could avoid a similar fate.

Southern China was a new type of territory unlike any other theatre of war the Mongols had encountered. The oppressive heat was unkind to the Steppe warriors and the mountainous terrain that filled the landscape was incompatible with their fluid, cavalry-based fighting style. In addition, Song cities were connected by an interweaving series of rivers that meant dominance on the water would prove essential for starving key cities and fortifications into submission.

As such, the conquest of southern China would require a serious investment of manpower, but Ögedei instead turned his attention to the west during the latter years of his rule. His forces did manage to capture the critical city of Xiangyang in 1236, but Song forces soon overwhelmed the garrison tasked with guarding it and recaptured the city in a counterattack.

Ögedei died in 1241 from alcoholism, aged 55. Due to political turmoil his successor, his son Güyük, wasn't coronated until 1246. Güyük also appeared to favour western expansion over southern China, but he died in 1248 before he had the chance to launch any serious campaigns. The rank of Great Khan then switched from Genghis' third son Ögedei's line to his fourth son, Tolui's. Tolui's son Möngke Khan came to power in 1251, and he placed his younger brother Kublai in control of northern China.

Kublai felt a strong affinity for China. As a child he had been nursed by a Tangut, and Chinese advisors featured prominently in his inner court. At this stage Kublai had limited military pedigree, but he swiftly whet his battle skills by launching a campaign against the Dali Kingdom, which sat on the Song's western border. Dali swiftly capitulated and Kublai and Möngke later launched a joint invasion against the Song. They split their hordes and marched down opposite flanks of Song territory, earning ground in many hard-fought engagements.

However, Möngke died while on the campaign in 1259, inciting discourse throughout the ruling family. Both Kublai and his younger brother Ariq

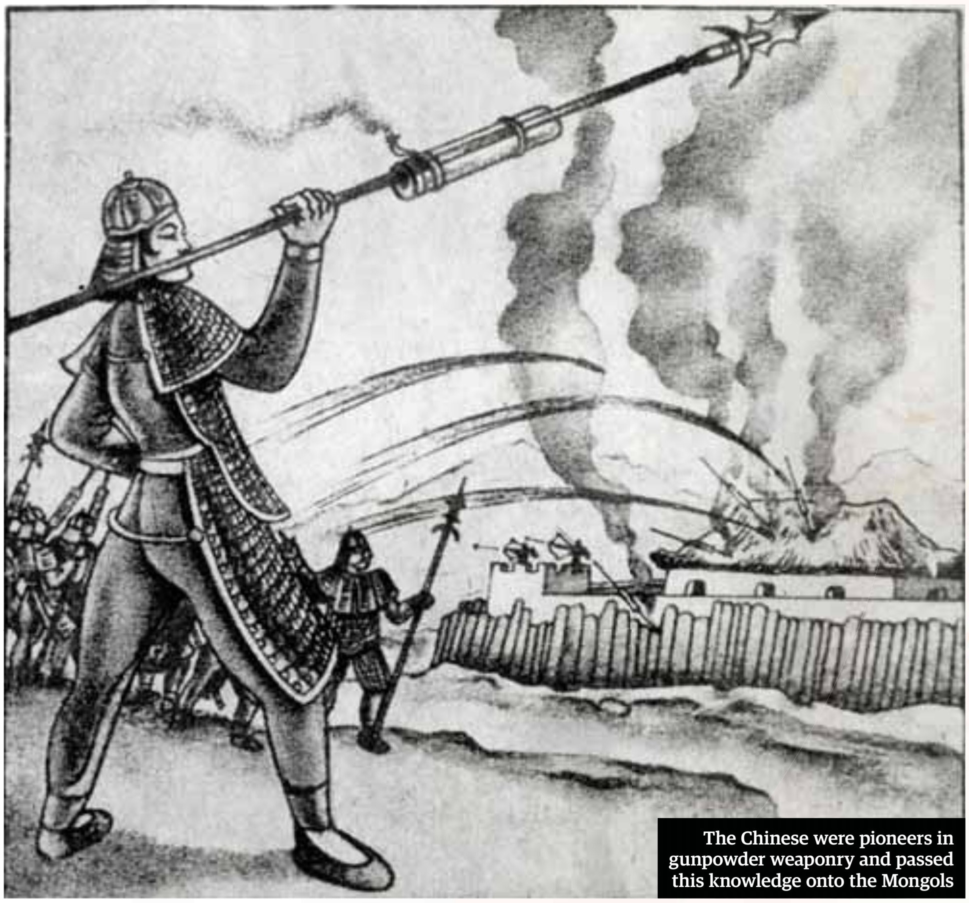
Assimilation

MORPHING FOES INTO SUBSERVIENT ALLIES WAS ONE OF THE MONGOLS' GREATEST STRENGTHS

The Mongols were nothing if not adaptable. They were masters of steppe warfare, but as Genghis Khan's horde spread out from Mongolia, they were found to be novices in many elements of medieval warfare. However, one way they accelerated their learning and manpower was by assimilating conquered foes into their ranks. It is safe to say that without the incorporation of Chinese soldiers into the Mongolian army, it would have been incredibly difficult – perhaps even impossible – for the Mongols to have conquered China.

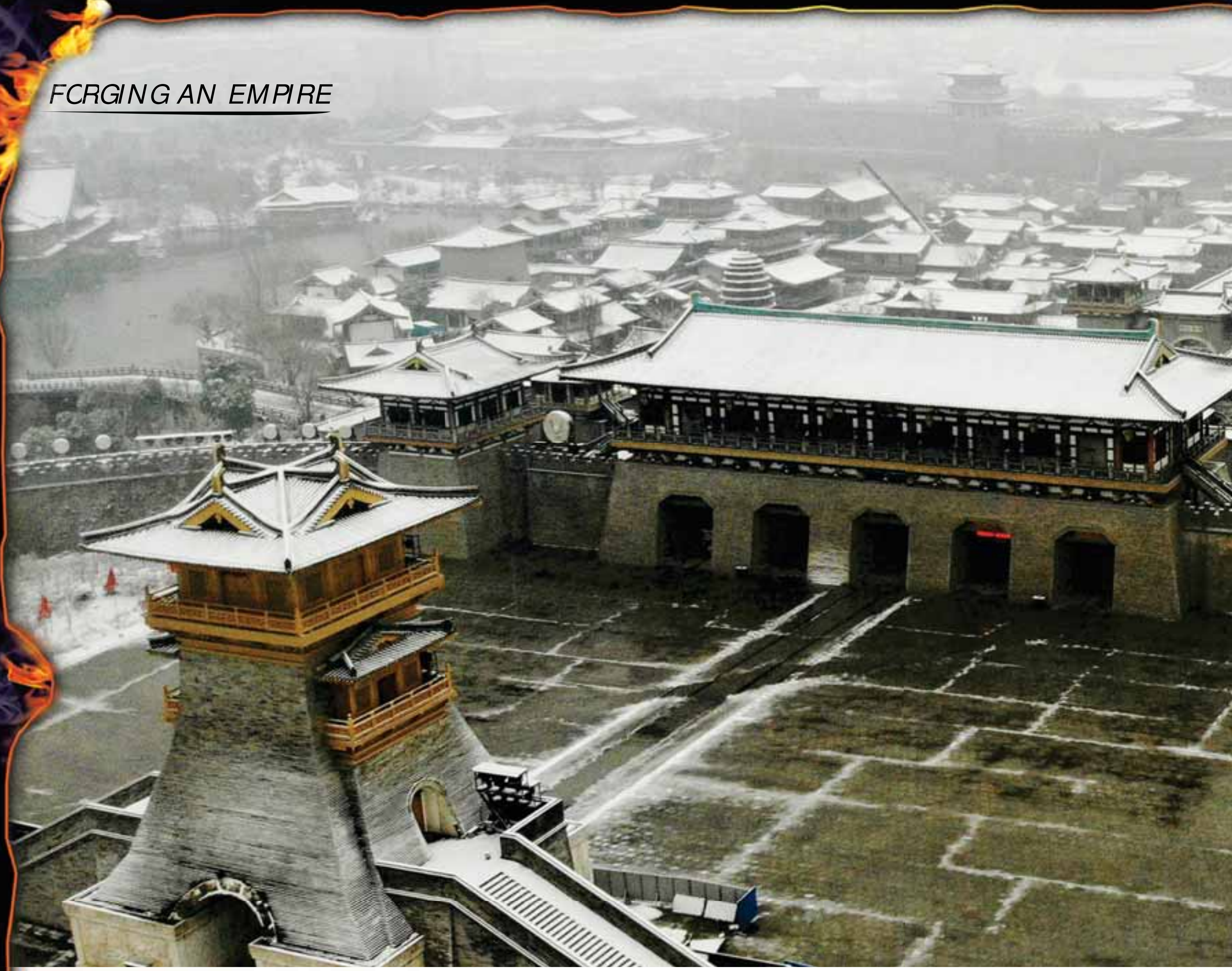
In the early years of Mongol invasion into north China, Chinese engineers were both captured and voluntarily defected to their cause, quickly helping the Mongol armies to grow accustomed to siege warfare. As the war continued and more Chinese continued to defect, many were placed at the vanguard of the Mongol armies. By assuming the most dangerous positions at the front of sieges, the Mongol generals hoped to keep their steppe warriors safe in exchange for the lives of expendable Chinese troops.

Yet more value came from the Chinese thanks to their knowledge of weaponry. After the fall of Kaifeng, the Mongols absorbed those who could educate them on gunpowder's use in weapons, adding another lethal element to their arsenal. By Kublai's era the Mongols in the army were actually outnumbered by their allies and conquered forces, highlighting just how prominent Chinese soldiers were in the Mongol conquest of China.



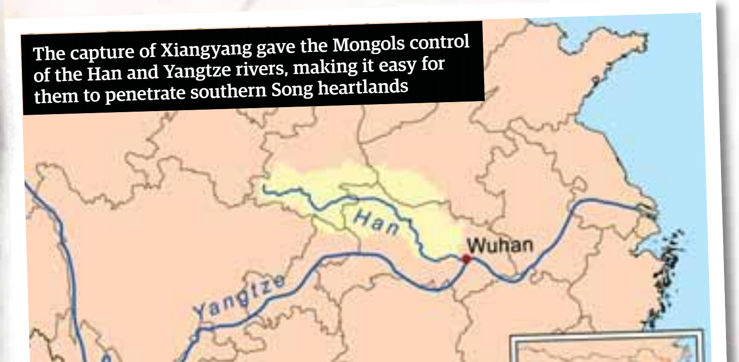
The Chinese were pioneers in gunpowder weaponry and passed this knowledge onto the Mongols

Images: Getty Images (Chinese towns, Silk Road, Assimilation); CeeGee CC BY-SA 4.0 (Tolui photo)



Böke had themselves declared Great Khan, forcing Kublai to make a truce with the Song while he turned his attention north to settle affairs with his sibling.

Ariq surrendered to Kublai in 1264, allowing the undisputed Great Khan to properly invest in the last great Mongol conquest – that of subjugating southern China. His major offensive started off successfully as his army won a large engagement and captured a fleet of ships in 1265. The Mongols next set their sights on Xiangyang, the same city Ögedei's forces had briefly captured in the 1230s. Kublai would have likely rued his predecessor's failure to hold the fortification, as Xiangyang sat on the banks of the Han River and was essential for dominating the waterways of Song territory.



The capture of Xiangyang gave the Mongols control of the Han and Yangtze rivers, making it easy for them to penetrate southern Song heartlands

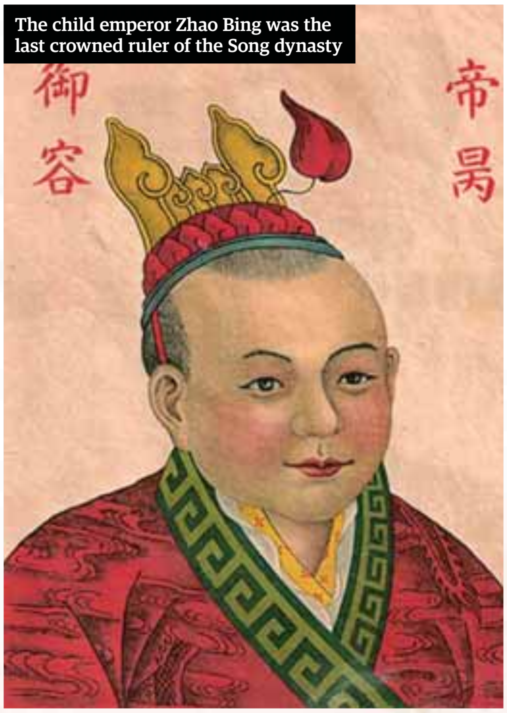
The Song understood that holding the city was critical to their war effort and so invested heavily in ensuring that it was kept well supplied with food and weaponry. Xiangyang would endure the siege for over five years, and it would take expertise from across the Mongol's vast empire to eventually topple it.

By the early 1270s the Great Khan's army was a chimera of different nationalities and battle styles, and it was this diversity of skill sets that allowed him to capture Xiangyang. Korean marines helped the newly constructed Mongolian naval warships to impose a blockade on the Han River, and in late 1272 Persian engineers designed a powerful trebuchet that could shatter the city's walls with 300-kilogram boulders. The northern Chinese lent their knowledge too, as crude gunpowder-based explosives could be loaded into these devastating war machines.

Xiangyang fell in 1273, and with it the will to continue fighting across many towns and cities of the Song Empire. Surrender and defections became commonplace, with many believing a Mongol victory was now inevitable, and some actually welcoming the rule of Kublai.

With the Yangtze and Han rivers now firmly under his control, Kublai mustered a gargantuan force of 200,000 to march on the capital of Hangzhou. In an echo of the Jin, the realisation that their capital was threatened turned the Song court against one other. Prominent members

The fortifications at the Song city of Xiangyang were formidable and resisted the Mongols for over five years



The child emperor Zhao Bing was the last crowned ruler of the Song dynasty

“Kublai ruled over China as emperor of the newly established Yuan dynasty”

jostled for power, achieving little and encouraging defections of their commanders to Kublai’s side. A massive Song army did manage to assemble just outside the capital, but after being bombarded by the Mongol’s catapults their loyalty began to waver, and many defected to the Mongol’s side. Accepting that continued resistance was futile, the Song empress capitulated in January 1276, but some defiant members of the court stubbornly refused to surrender.

They swiftly declared a new emperor, Duanzong – who was only six years old at the time – and fled. Duanzong died of illness at the age of eight, but his younger brother was elevated to the rank of emperor by the dying embers of the Song. Zhao Bing, however, would be the last emperor of the Song dynasty.

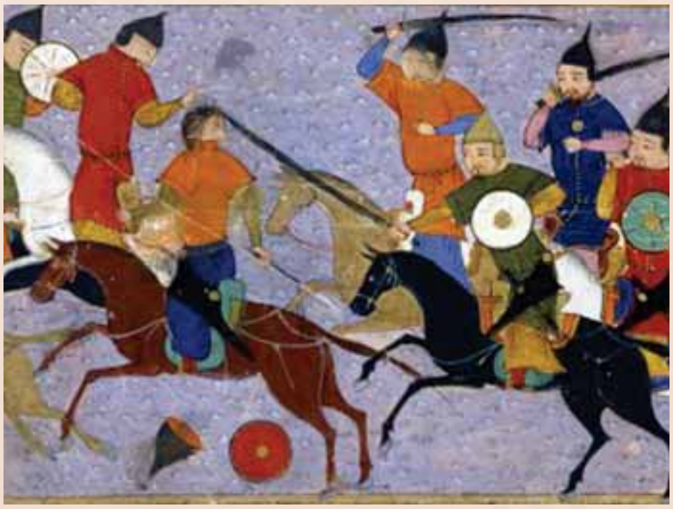
The Song made their last stand off the coast of Guangdong, where they’d anchored and bound together roughly 1,000 ships to prevent retreat. Despite withstanding the Mongol navy initially, in March 1279 the Mongols launched a vicious assault on the fleet’s centre. One of the emperor’s advisors watched the enemy close on them with mounting horror and eventually resolved to grab Zhao Bing in his arms. He then leapt overboard, killing them both. In that moment it was over: Kublai Khan had become the undisputed master of all China.

The Mongols were the first foreign conquerors to ever dominate the entire Chinese domain. It had taken over 70 years, and in that time the Mongol Empire had grown and fragmented, the army had changed dramatically and even the ruling khanate had evolved. Kublai ruled over China as emperor of the newly established Yuan dynasty and embraced the Chinese way of life, but it was still a Mongol who sat on the throne. The steppe nomads had entered the 13th century as China’s bothersome northern neighbours, yet they would leave it as supreme overlords of the entire state.

Images: Kmusser CC BY-SA 3.0 (Han and Yangtze rivers map); Alamy (Song city)

SIX MONGOL Sackings

WRITTEN BY JACK GRIFFITHS



Samarkand

1220

Death toll: Approx. 100,000

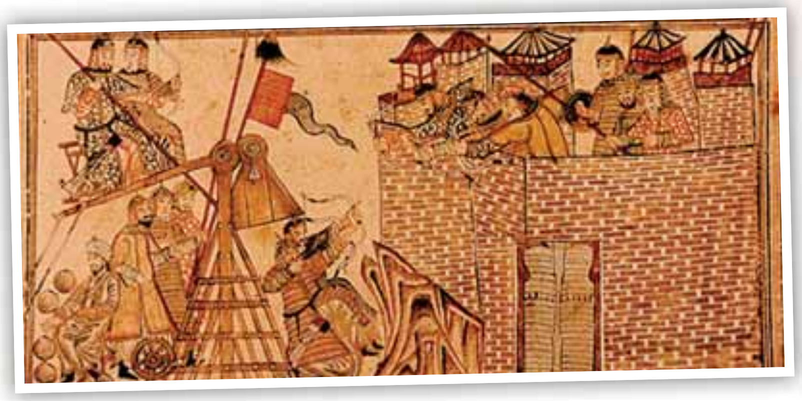
The sacking of Samarkand was a key moment in one of Genghis Khan's first major conquests and was a signal of the warlord's intent. The city was an important trade hub for the Khwarezmian Empire and its destruction would be an economic hammer blow. Samarkand was strongly defended, so the attackers had to combine skill with tenacity. Covered by projectiles launched from trebuchets and siege bows, the infantry advanced using prisoners from past skirmishes as shields. The city's garrison fought stoutly, even attempting a counter-attack on the third day of the siege. This bold move was to be their undoing, as the Mongols defeated the defenders in hand-to-hand-combat, luring them in with a faked retreat. After five days many had surrendered, but 2,000 soldiers held out in the citadel. This rearguard bravery angered Genghis Khan, who renounced the earlier terms of surrender and executed every last man.

MERV

1221

Death toll: Approx. 70,000

Barely a year after he had laid waste to Samarkand, Genghis Khan was on the march again. There had been no letup in the Mongol expansion, which had now spread into Russia. Merv was the capital of the Seljuk Sultanate and one of the largest cities in the world in the 13th century. It was also one of the most impressive, with canals, markets and gardens alongside libraries and bathhouses. Genghis Khan cared little for this splendour, and in preparation for an assault he destroyed a nearby dam, thereby cutting off the city's water supply. Merv's garrison fought bravely against the Mongols over six days but eventually laid down their arms after they were promised they would be spared. Genghis Khan, true to form, went back on his word and ordered the massacre of all the inhabitants while he watched from atop a golden throne. Its people dead, the once great city became a ghost town, never fully recovering.



Kaifeng

1229

Death toll: Approx. Unknown

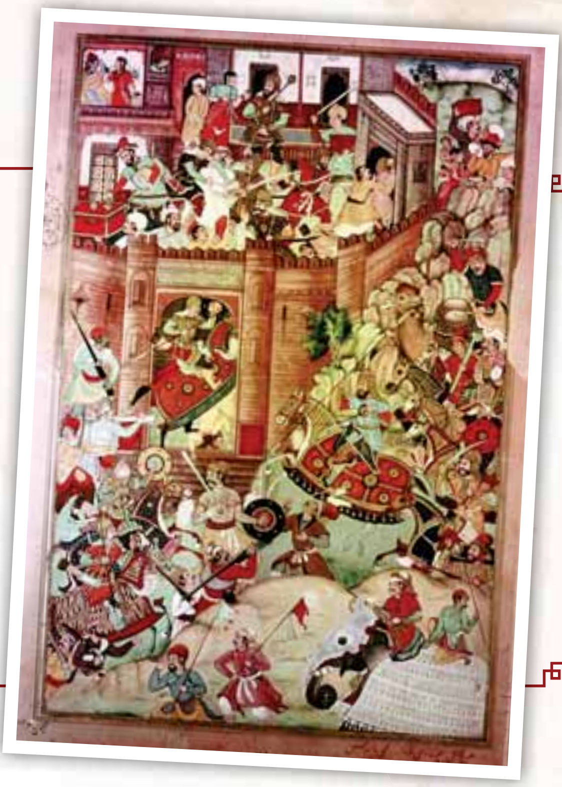
The Jin dynasty had long been a rival of the Mongol Empire and war had raged for more than two decades by the time of the sacking of Kaifeng. The capital's defeat would be a deathblow for the dynasty. The attackers were led by a new Khan in Ögedei, who had forged a temporary alliance with the Song – the Jins' rivals. The siege began slowly, with the defenders using fire and gunpowder bombs that exploded with clusters of shrapnel. The Mongols were aided by the arrival of 20,000 Song troops, and even though the assault never broke the gates, starvation and disease began to take their toll on the city. Forced to eat their own horses and prisoners, disease soon ravaged the people of Kaifeng, and the siege was deliberately stalled to allow a plague to wreak havoc. The white flag was eventually waved after the Jin emperor committed suicide having first abdicated the throne in order to avoid becoming the last Jin emperor. Northern China now belonged to the Mongols.

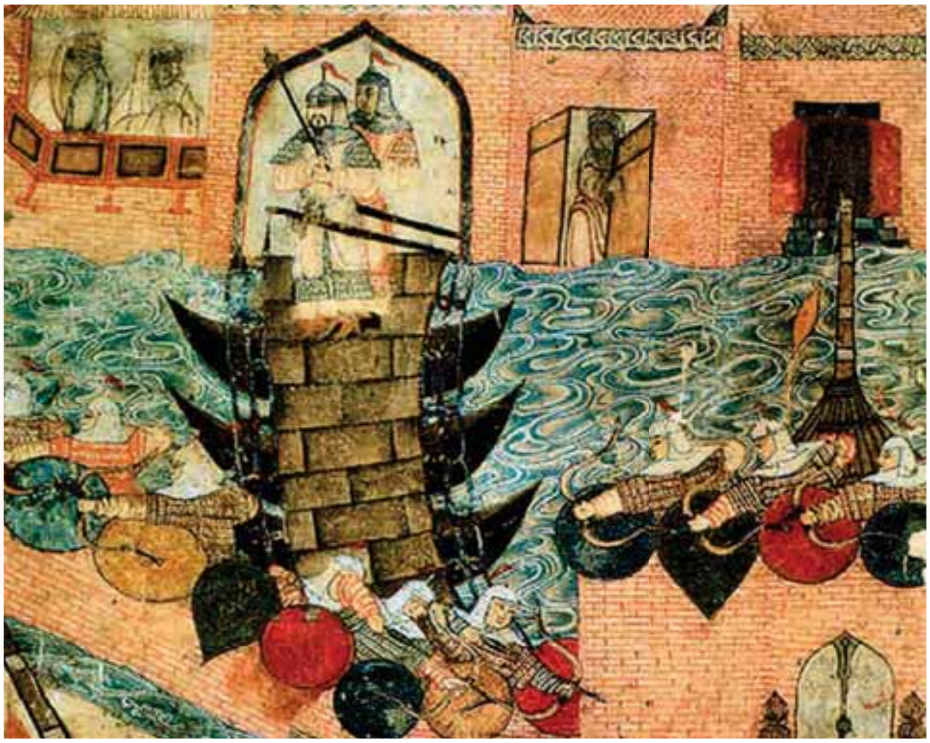
LAHORE

1241

Death toll: Approx. Unknown

By the early 1240s, the Delhi Sultanate had become the next power to be at conflict with the Mongols. The northern Indian sultanate was in the midst of a succession crisis and its power base was weakened. The Mongols smelled blood, and having already traded with the city, knew that some of the inhabitants would welcome their rule. Military leader Malik Kara Kush, however, had other ideas and commanded the Lahore defences bravely and skilfully as the siege began. Kush was in dire need of aid, but a relief army from Delhi came to nothing after a communication breakdown. The sultan managed to escape under the cover of night but the city was taken the next day. Furious street-to-street fighting ensued after the walls crumbled, but the relentless Mongol assault finally proved too much even for Kush. Yet despite its defeat Lahore continued to be a thorn in the side of the Mongols, and it was invaded again a century later.





BAGHDAD

1258

Death toll: Approx. 200,000

In the 13th century Baghdad was a centre of arts and culture where scholars and engineers from around the world came to study. It was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, an Islamic dynasty and a long-time adversary of the Mongols. In 1258, Möngke, one of Genghis Khan's grandsons, launched a siege on the city that would last ten days. The appetite for the population of Baghdad to defend its city was lessened due to friction between the Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. The bloody battle culminated in the death of the dynasty's leader, the caliph, who was rolled up in a carpet and stamped to death. The fall of Baghdad marked the end of 500 years of Sunni Muslim rule and the Islamic Golden Age. The defeat shook the Muslim world as mosques were levelled to the ground and important historical and religious texts destroyed by fire. With Baghdad in his possession, Möngke set his sights on the remainder of the Middle East and North Africa.

Xiangyang & Fancheng

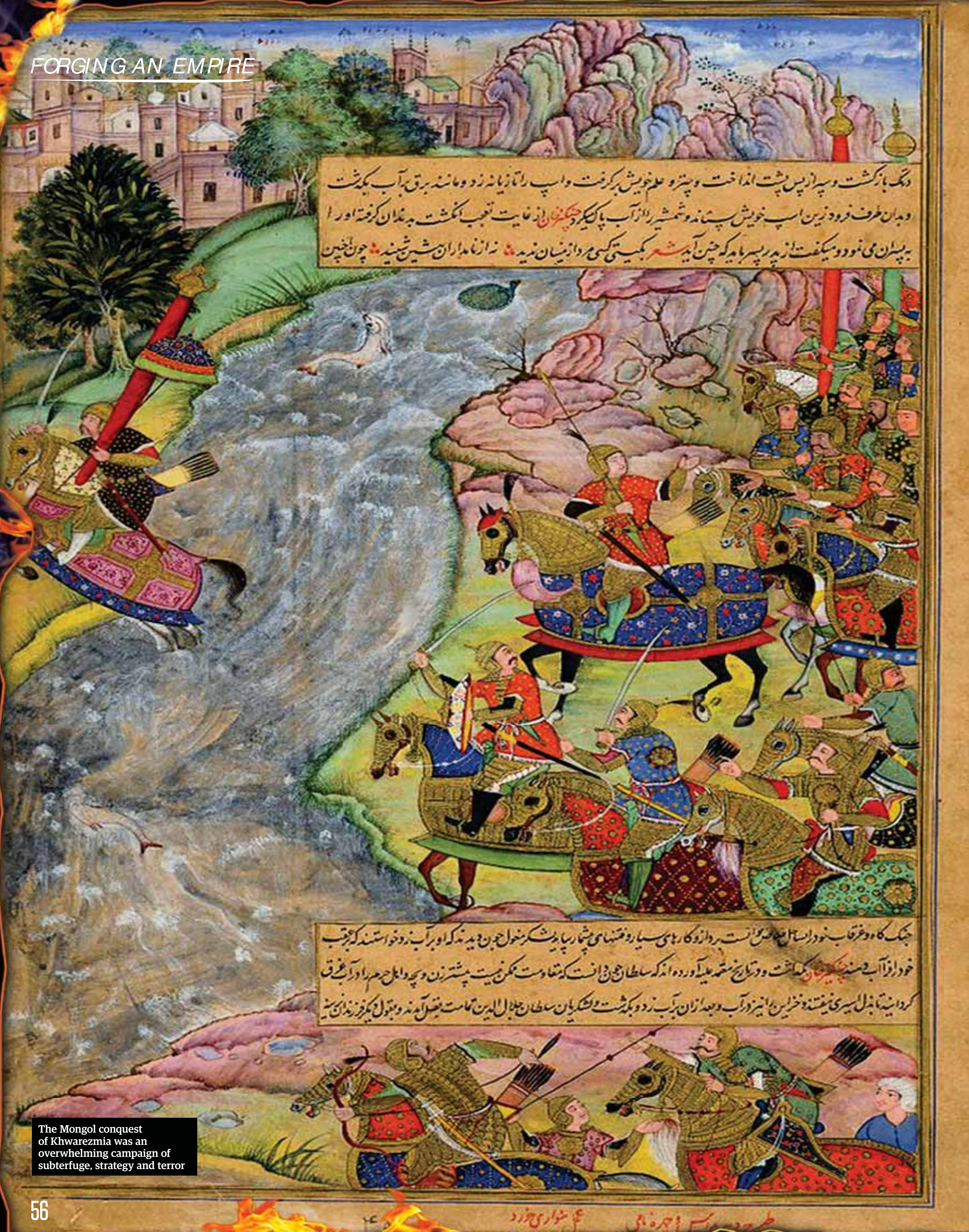
1265

Death toll: Approx. 10,000

The fall of these two Song fortress cities demonstrated the cold efficiency of the Mongol war machine. Their imposing battlements and wide moats posed an almost impregnable obstacle even for the Mongols, so they cut off the cities' supply route at a nearby river confluence. Following this, siege weapons surrounded the cities. The Song defenders had prepared for this and padded the battlements so missiles would simply bounce off. The Mongols countered by introducing longer-range trebuchets constructed by allied Persian engineers to the battlefield. The new technology worked, but even though the walls had been levelled, Song soldiers matched the Mongol infantry as furious fighting broke out. Only once the breach had been widened were the attackers able to overwhelm the city.

Eventually, after six bloody years of fighting, the sieges came to an end, heralding the defeat of a territory that had managed to repel relentless Mongol assaults for three decades. The cities' reward for resisting the invaders for so long was for all their remaining residents to have their throats slit in cold blood.

Images: Getty Images (Lahore, Merv)



دنگ بازگشت و سپر از پس پشت انداخت و چتر و علم خویش برگرفت و اسپ را تازیانه زد و مانند برق بر آب بگذشت
و بدان طرف فرود زین اسپ خویش پیشانند و شمشیر را از آب پاک کرد چنگیز خان از غایت تعجب انگشت به دندان گرفته او را
به پسران می نمود و میگفت از پدر پسر باید که چنین آید شعر بگیتی کسی مرد ازینسان ندید ٭ نه از نامداران پیشین شنید ٭ چون چنین

جنگ گاه و عقاب خود را استال حاصل توانست برد ازو کارهای بسیار و فتنهای بیشمار رفت لشکر مغول چون دیدند که او بر آب زد خواستند که بر عقب
خود را از آب در سند چنگیز خان نگذاشت و در تاریخ معتمد علیه آورده اند که سلطان چون دانست که مقاومت ممکن نیست بیشتر زن و بچه و اهل حرم را در آب غرق
گردانید تا بذل اسیری نیفتند و خزاین را نیز در آب و بعد از آن بر آب زد و بگذشت و لشکریان سلطان جلال الدین تمامت بقتل آمدند و بقول دیگر فرزندان سینه

The Mongol conquest of Khwarezmia was an overwhelming campaign of subterfuge, strategy and terror

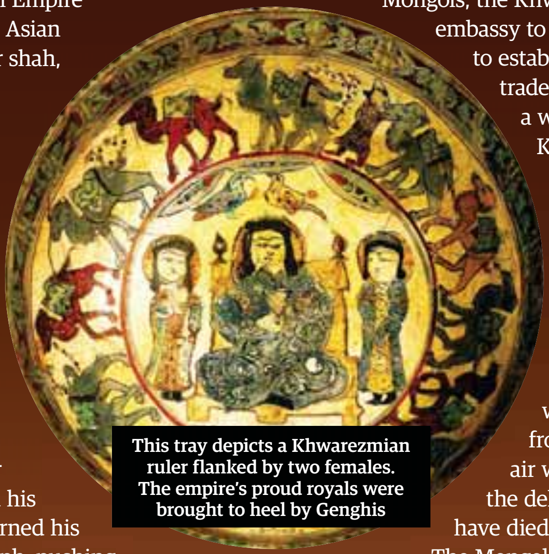
Crushing KHWAREZMIA

THE MONGOLS' FIRST CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE MUSLIM WORLD SET A PRECEDENT: SURRENDER OR DIE

Written by Hareth Al Bustani

At the turn of the 13th century, the once-mighty Seljuk Empire fractured, leaving the Muslim world in a power vacuum. While the caliph's Abbasid dynasty, centred in Baghdad, enjoyed a brief resurgence, so too did another, further east in Central Asia. With a realm spanning Persia, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Russia, the Khwarezmian Empire had grown into a Central Asian superpower. The ruler, or shah, Ala Al Din Muhammad, was an ambitious man, who not only refused to capitulate to the caliph's authority but dreamed of subjecting the caliph to his. First, however, he would have to break free from the yoke of the neighbouring Qara Khitai Empire of eastern Turkestan. In 1210, after defeating the rival power of Samarkand, he moved his capital there and then turned his attention back to the caliph, pushing all the way to Iran's westernmost reaches.

Muhammad's fortunes were further bolstered by chaos in the rival Qara Khitai Empire. After being forced from his lands by the Mongols, a noble from another tribe took shelter among the Qara Khitai nobility, only to instigate a coup. His brief, intolerant and oppressive rule so terrified his Muslim populace they appealed to the Mongols for help. Happy to oblige, Genghis Khan sent in 20,000 soldiers – welcomed as liberators – and their enemy was crucified on the gates of Kashgar's main mosque, mirroring his treatment of the city's imam. In the process the Mongols had pushed their western border all the way to the Khwarezmian Empire.

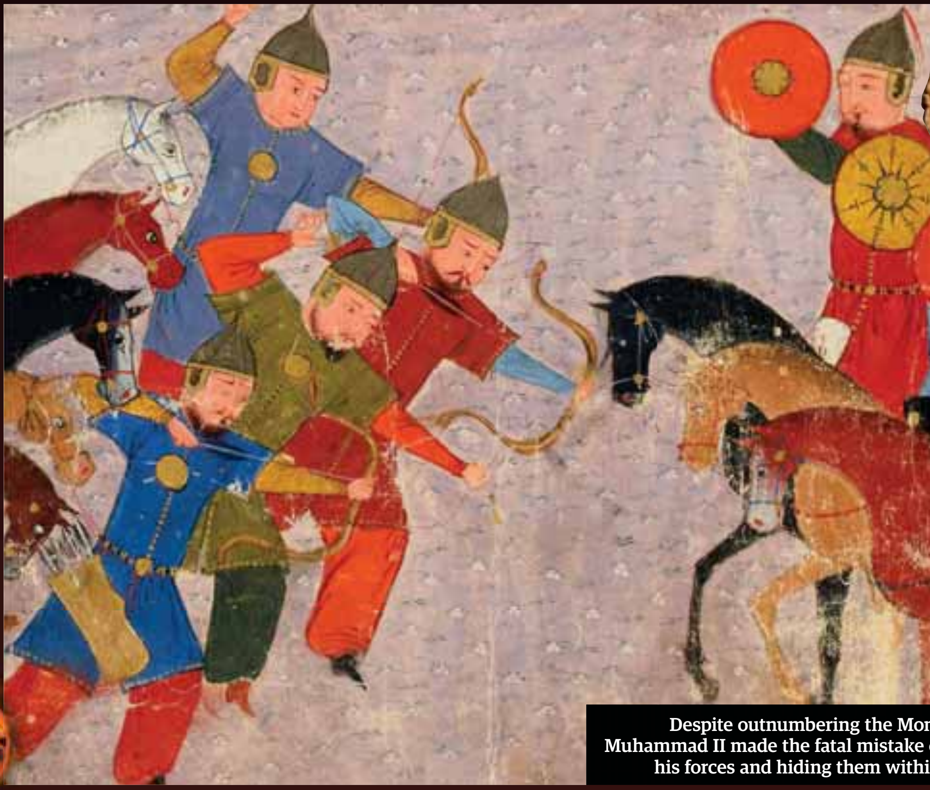


This tray depicts a Khwarezmian ruler flanked by two females. The empire's proud royals were brought to heel by Genghis

When the Jin capital of Beijing also fell to the Mongols, the Khwarezmians sent an embassy to Genghis in an attempt to establish diplomatic and trade relations. Looking over a white hill, one of the Khwarezmian envoys supposedly asked what it was, only to be told it was a pile of bones. He heard how 60,000 virgins threw themselves off a wall to escape the Mongol wrath. Elsewhere, roads were covered in grease from human fat, and the air was so noxious some of the delegates were alleged to have died.

The Mongols were intrigued by their new neighbour. They knew the Khwarezmians produced excellent steel and armour, and Genghis always made a point of studying potential rivals to an obsessive degree. Keen to find out more, in 1218 he sent a trade mission to the Khwarezmian frontier post of Utrar with the message, "I am the sovereign of the sunrise, and thou the sovereign of the sunset."

Images: Alamy

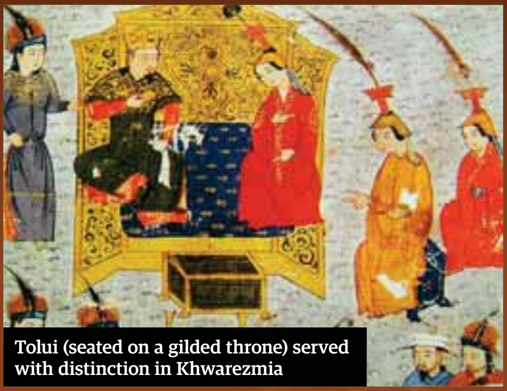


Despite outnumbering the Mongols, Shah Muhammad II made the fatal mistake of dividing his forces and hiding them within his cities

Shah Muhammad II (honoured on this gold dinar coin) dreamed of placing the entire Islamic world beneath his yoke

There, however, they fell out of favour with the local governor, who accused them of harbouring spies, and had them executed. While his accusation was most likely fair, such an egregious act was an insult the proud Mongols could not bear. To make matters worse, when Genghis sent three more ambassadors to procure an apology, one was killed, and two more had their beards shaved off. Genghis, who saw himself as the defender of Eternal Heaven on Earth, viewed this as a crime against heaven itself. One account describes how he climbed a hill and prayed for three days and nights before boldly declaring, "I was not the author of this trouble; grant me strength to exact vengeance."

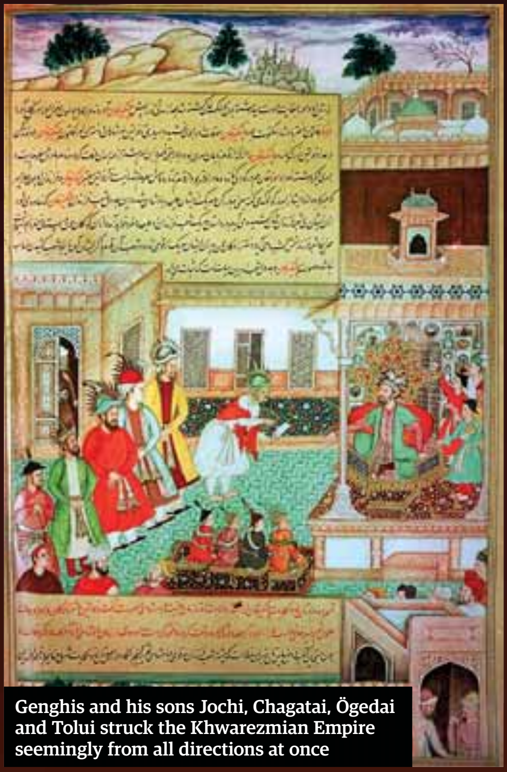
Fearing a long and protracted war against a powerful foe, Genghis began gathering an enormous army of Mongols, Chinese, Karluks and Uyghur Muslims. While he was impatient to annihilate his belligerent neighbours, the Khan never embarked on conquests of this scale without carefully observing his enemies. Mongol agents flooded west, picking up gossip at markets and merchant caravans. As the information trickled back, it soon became apparent that despite the steely facade, all was not well in Khwarezmia.



Tolui (seated on a gilded throne) served with distinction in Khwarezmia

Having made an enemy of the caliph, Shah Muhammad eroded much of his good will among his Muslim populace, alienating them. Moreover, with an empire sprawling Iran, Afghanistan and Transoxiana, there were deep divisions between his own Persian supporters and those of his mother, mainly Qangli and Qipchaq Turks from the north. The Turkish ruling class were loathed by their Persian subjects, crushed beneath the yoke of heavy taxation. Knowing he could never mobilise a popular jihad, the shah depended on an unreliable cocktail of mixed mercenaries.

In 1219, Genghis finally descended upon Khwarezmia with an army of up to 250,000 warriors. Although the shah commanded twice as many men, unwilling to risk a pitched battle, he divided his forces up and garrisoned them in his cities. While his son, Jalal Al Din, protested this strategy, the shah was convinced his cities could outlast the Mongol invaders. He failed to take into account that the nomadic Mongols were perfectly suited for long-term, distant sieges, even bringing their own livestock with them. Their soldiers were highly disciplined, their strategies meticulous and armies well organised. They also brought Chinese siege engineers with them to destroy forts with gunpowder or mining. Turkic collaborators, meanwhile, such as the Uyghurs and Qara Khitai, were intimately familiar with the inner workings of the empire.



Genghis and his sons Jochi, Chagatai, Ögedai and Tolui struck the Khwarezmian Empire seemingly from all directions at once

Genghis split his army into three wings; one led by his sons Chagatai and Ögedei, another by his son Jochi, and finally, one led by himself and his youngest son, Tolui. Bordered by the 800-kilometre Syr Darya River to the east, the Amu Darya River to the west, and the Kyzylkum Desert between, the shah knew the enemy's options were limited. He naturally assumed they would focus their attention primarily on the eastern region of Transoxiana. Fittingly, Chagatai and Ögedei arrived at Utrar first, the site of the Mongol humiliation, and rained down stones until their catapults collapsed. Though the city put up a defiant fight, when it fell Chagatai and Ögedei seized the offending governor and killed him by pouring molten gold down his throat.

As the shah reeled from the attack, a second Mongol army under Jochi marched over the treacherous Tian Shan mountain range at lighting speed, capturing settlements along the Syr Darya River, before arriving at the city of Khojend. Simultaneously, Genghis performed a masterstroke, using local guides to navigate the oases of the supposedly unpassable Kyzylkum Desert before suddenly appearing behind the shah's lines at the gates of Bukhara - the richest and busiest city of Transoxiana.

At Bukhara, the Turkish garrison tried to break out but were devastated, and the city fell

THE GREAT CAVALRY RAID

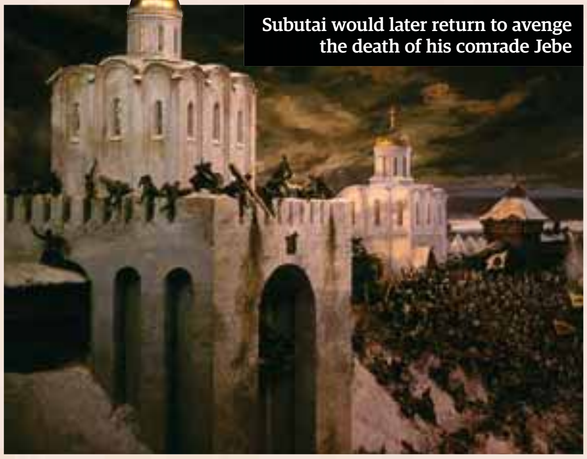
FROM KHWAREZMIA, JEBE AND SUBUTAI EMBARKED ON ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS OF ALL TIME

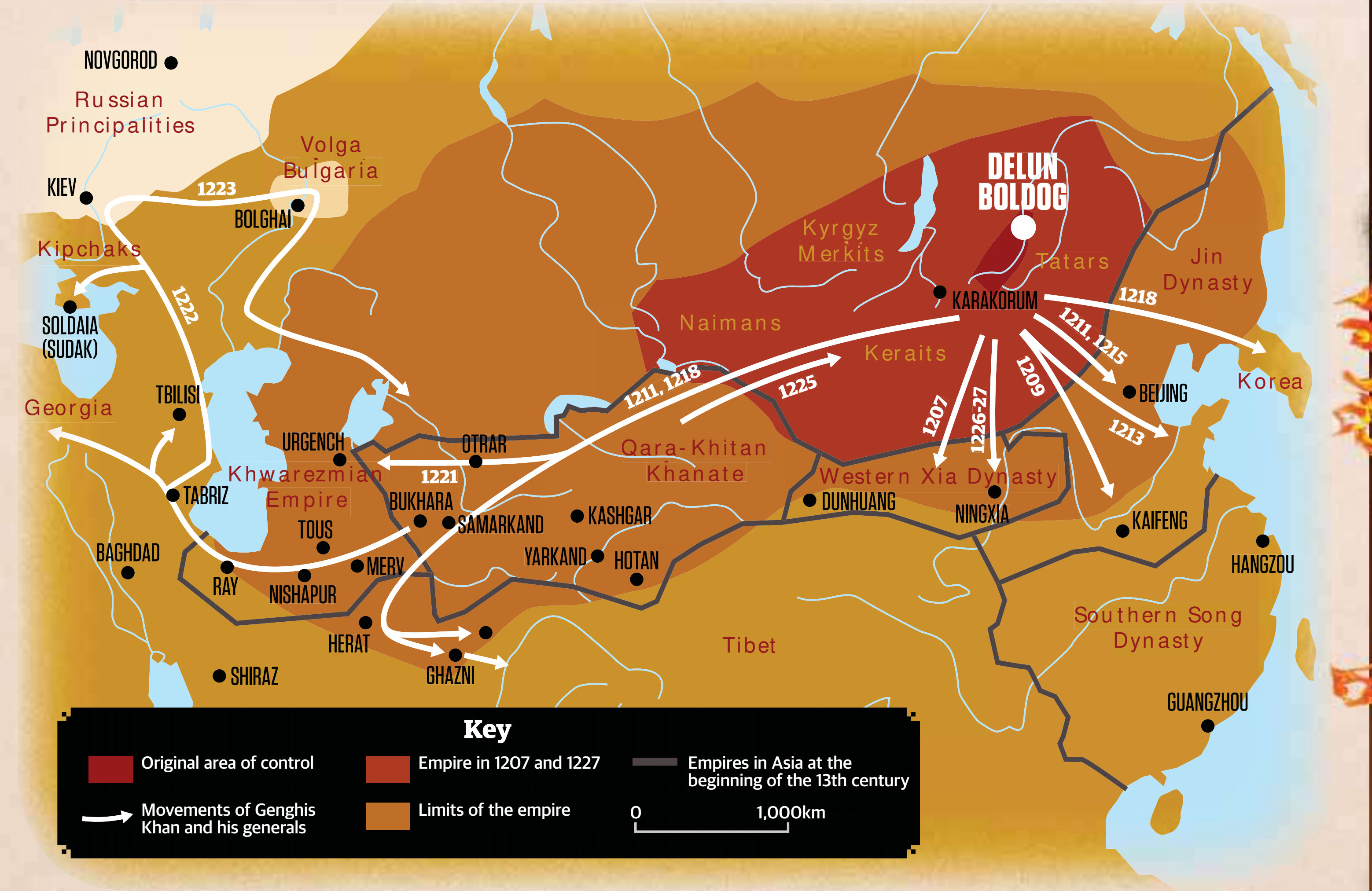
When the shah fled from Merv, Genghis' captains Jebe and Subutai chased him down with 40,000 men, riding up to 130 kilometres a day, wearing out their horses only to leap onto their spares and exhaust them too. They captured the shah's mother and harem, seized his crown jewels and even defeated an army of 30,000 at Rai before finally chasing the shah over the Caspian Sea. For their relentless war against the shah they were imagined in Europe as Christian crusaders, with Genghis as King David. Christendom was in for a shock.

From their base in Azerbaijan, Jebe and Subutai raided Georgia and defeated an army of 10,000, critically wounding the king himself. They later rode over the Caucasus Mountains, led over the Derbent Pass by local guides, into the clutches of a Kipchaq army, bolstered with Khwarezmian refugees backed by a coalition of Alans, Lezgians and Cherkesses. Outnumbered, Subutai remarkably appealed to the Kipchaqs as kindred spirits, convincing them to leave the alliance only to ambush and destroy them later near the River Don.

They went on to raid the Crimean Peninsula, capturing the Genoan trading port of Sudak, where, having traversed a quarter of the globe, Jebe may have become the best-travelled soldier of all time. On their way home, they once again ran into the Kipchaqs, this time with a coalition of princes from Kiev, Galacia and Chernigov – all called Mstislav – with a gargantuan army of 90,000 men. The Mongols feigned an epic retreat for ten days before suddenly turning and smashing the enemy. To avoid shedding royal blood, the Mongols had the princes crushed to death beneath wooden planks.

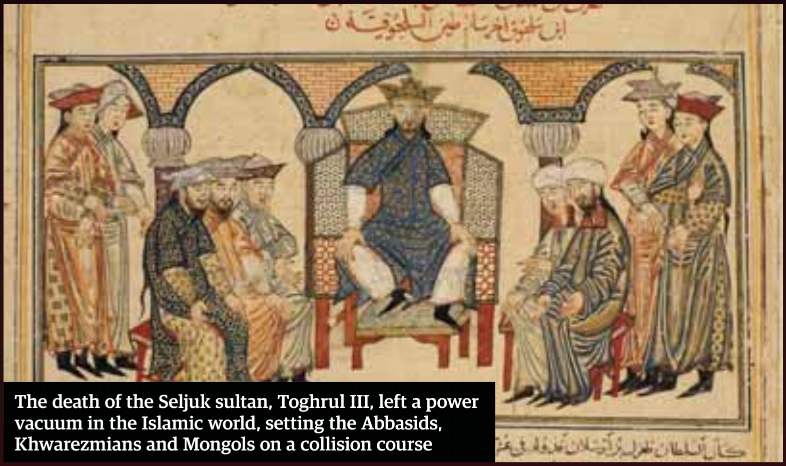
Further northeast, they crossed over the Volga to attack the Bulgars, but having been whittled away by so much conflict were ambushed and defeated. Although Jebe himself may have died in this battle, Subutai would avenge the defeat in 1237 during the second Mongol invasion of Europe.


Subutai would later return to avenge the death of his comrade Jebe


NOVGOROD
Russian Principalities
Volga Bulgaria
KIEV
1223
BOLGHAI
Kipchaks
1222
SOLDAIA (SUDAK)
TBILISI
Georgia
URGENCH
OTRAR
Khwarezmian Empire
1221
TABRIZ
BUKHARA
SAMARKAND
KASHGAR
TOUS
BAGHDAD
RAY
NISHAPUR
MERV
YARKAND
HOTAN
HERAT
SHIRAZ
GHAZNI
Tibet
Naimans
1211, 1218
1225
Qara-Khitan Khanate
Kyrgyz Merkits
DELUN BOLDOG
Tatars
KARAKORUM
Keraits
1207
1226-27
1209
1211, 1215
1213
1218
Jin Dynasty
Korea
BEIJING
Western Xia Dynasty
DUNHUANG
NINGXIA
KAIFENG
HANGZOU
Southern Song Dynasty
GUANGZHOU
Key
Original area of control
Movements of Genghis Khan and his generals
Empire in 1207 and 1227
Limits of the empire
Empires in Asia at the beginning of the 13th century
0
1,000km

> "Having traversed a quarter of the globe, Jebe may have become the best-travelled soldier of all time"

Images: Alamy (all); except Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. CC BY-SA 2.5 (coins)


The death of the Seljuk sultan, Toghrul III, left a power vacuum in the Islamic world, setting the Abbasids, Khwarezmians and Mongols on a collision course

soon after. As buildings burned all around, spewing thick smoke into the air, Genghis stormed into the pulpit of the main mosque and delivered a sermon, declaring himself the "Flail of God", sent to punish them for their sins. Though the Mongols spared the populace, artisans, skilled workers and those with technical knowledge were drafted into the army or sent to Mongolia. Citizens with no skills were forced into slave labour, to dig moats, move siege engines and battering rams, or even placed at the head of the army to serve as human shields. Advisors defected to the Mongol ranks, and Genghis began sending messengers out with false orders, forging letters claiming that scores of soldiers were abandoning the shah due to his ill treatment of his mother. He even wrote to the shah's mother, offering her the throne if she betrayed her son. The resultant chaos drove many to simply lay down their arms and flee.

Leaving a garrison of 60,000 men in the capital, even the shah fled west, hoping to raise troops in Persian Iraq. Once again, his own son Jalal refuted his cowardice and the signal he was sending his abandoned people. Although Samarkand's leading religious figure negotiated a surrender - securing safe passage for 50,000 scholars and nobles - when a core of hardened soldiers hunkered down in the inner citadel, the Mongols decided to make an example of the city. After just ten days the city was torn down and the garrison massacred, followed by hundreds of thousands of civilians.

> "Genghis stormed into the pulpit and declared himself the 'Flail of God'"

While Genghis continued his campaign, two captains, Jebe and Subutai, chased the shah all the way to an island off the Caspian Sea, where he supposedly died of hunger. Having broken the Khwarezmian army, Genghis escalated his conquest dramatically, unleashing a violent campaign of psychological warfare on the region of Khorasan - the resource-rich homeland of the shahs spanning Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, south of the Aral Sea. With no stones to quarry, the Mongols cut down whole mulberry groves, hardened their trunks in water and fashioned them into projectiles and battering rams.

Genghis placed his sons Jochi, Chagatai and Ögedei in charge of the siege of Gurganj, but when the three began to quarrel, gave sole command to Ögedei. Due to the infighting the siege lasted more than half a year. When Gurganj finally fell the Mongols destroyed its dam, flooding the town and diverting the Oxus from its course for centuries. As they trawled through the city the Mongols shipped off its artisans, enslaved its women and children and massacred everyone else, assigning each soldier 24 victims to slaughter. The Khan hoped this carnage would terrify neighbouring towns into surrendering. As throngs of refugees dragged themselves away from the Mongol hordes, it did not take long for news, and the cloud of Mongol hellfire, to spread.

JALOLIDDIN MANGUBERDI - 800 yil
25
SO'M
The indefatigable Jalal remains popular in Central Asia, adorning the Uzbekistani 25 so'm coin

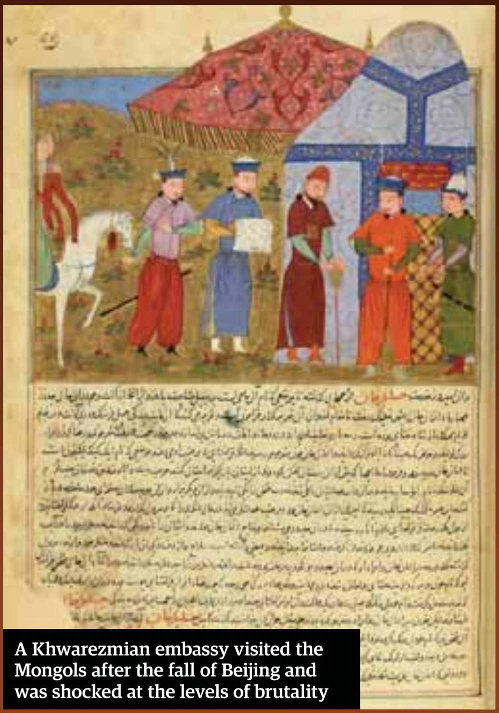
The Last of the Khwarezmians

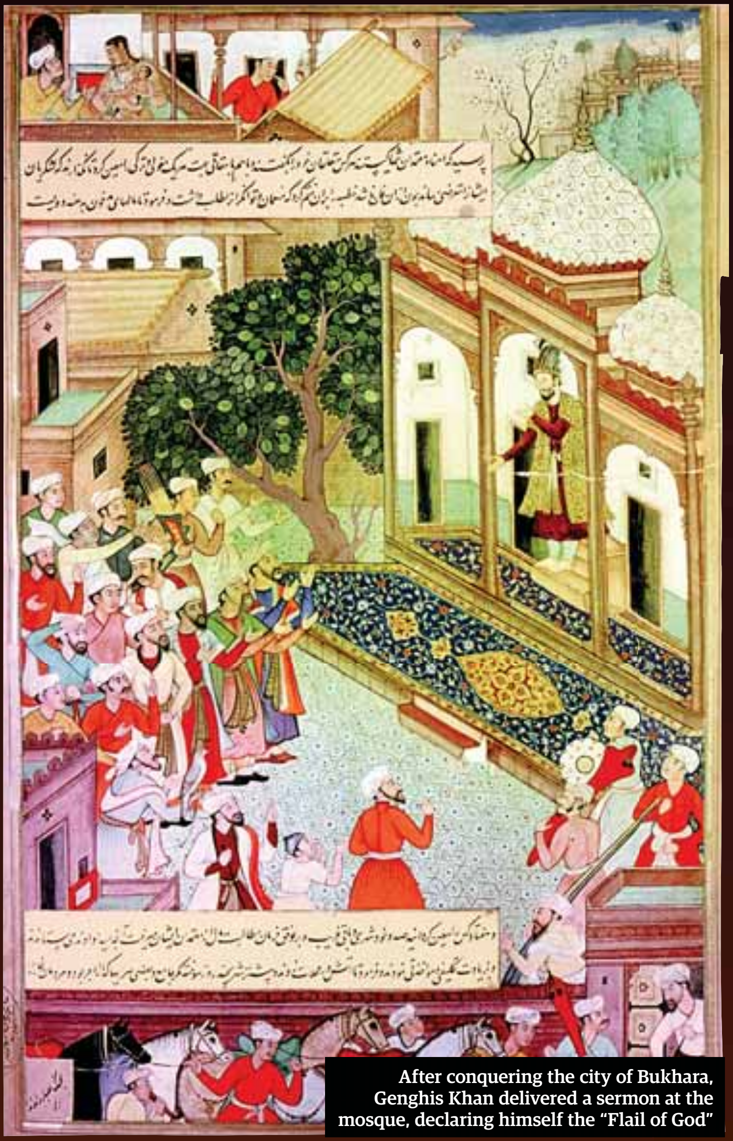
IN JALAL AL DIN, GENGHIS KHAN FOUND A WORTHY FOE

When the shah disappeared, his son, Jalal, adopted the Turkish title of sultan rather than the Persian shah. However, his preference for meritocracy over nepotism earned him few friends. After escaping a plot on his life at Gurganj, he linked up with two generals, leading 90,000 men to the Panjshir Valley, where he defeated a Mongol detachment. Furious, Genghis sent 30,000 men to wipe the enemy out only to be decisively defeated at the Battle of Pavan. Jalal lost half his men soon after when one of his generals left in a fit of pique.

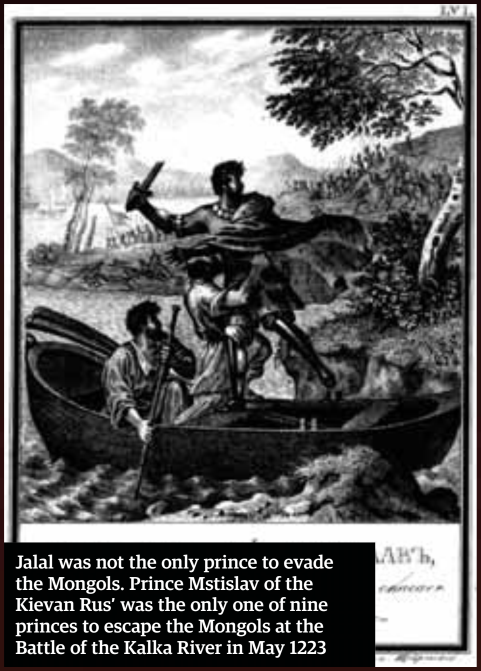
Desperate to keep up appearances, Genghis chased Jalal 595 kilometres to the Indus River. Despite being outnumbered, the sultan repeatedly charged at the enemy before finally hurtling across the river on his horse. Stunned, Genghis boomed, "Such sons should a father have!" Having raised another army in India, Jalal returned to the anarchic Persia in 1224 before conquering Azerbaijan and invading Georgia numerous times, destroying all the churches in Tiflis. By 1228 he had restored much of his realm, which spanned Iran, Persian Iraq and Azerbaijan.

However, rather than consolidating his rule, Jalal continued his father's haughty hostility against rival Muslim powers, leading to a devastating joint Ayyubid and Seljuk invasion in 1230. At this critical moment the Mongols returned, chasing Jalal into the mountains of Diyarbakir, where he was unceremoniously killed by a bandit.


A Khwarezmian embassy visited the Mongols after the fall of Beijing and was shocked at the levels of brutality



After conquering the city of Bukhara, Genghis Khan delivered a sermon at the mosque, declaring himself the "Flail of God"



Jalal was not the only prince to evade the Mongols. Prince Mstislav of the Kievan Rus' was the only one of nine princes to escape the Mongols at the Battle of the Kalka River in May 1223

Chroniclers wrote how amid great bloodshed in Tirmidh, when a desperate woman told the attackers she had swallowed a pearl, the Mongols simply tore her belly open before proceeding to disembowel all corpses for treasure. At Balkh, the Khan's son Tolui barraged the city with 3,000 machines firing heavy incendiary arrows, 300 catapults, 700 mangonels hurling naptha-filled pots, 4,000 ladders and 2,500 sacks of earth to fill in moats. Though he spared Balkh itself, when he took Merv in February 1221, despite promising clemency, he was said to have massacred 700,000 people.

During these bloodbaths inhabitants were led outside the city walls, where each Mongol soldier, wielding a battle axe, was assigned a number of people to slaughter, taking an ear from each back to their officers for counting. They would return days after each massacre to scour the city, dragging out any remaining wretches from their holes and butchering them. Yet despite his capacity for cruelty, Genghis had a deep respect for learning. In the city of Khwarazm, where 50,000 troops were said to have been assigned 24 victims each, the Khan offered safe passage to the Sufi master, Najm Al Din Kubra. Kubra declined, courageously accepting his fate.

Tolui had a particularly brutal point to prove at Nishapur, where the Khan's son-in-law had previously been killed by an arrow fired from the city walls. Genghis' daughter supervised the subsequent bloodbath, which saw every living creature in the city murdered, down to its cats and dogs, and heads piled into pyramids, separated by men, women and children. Having received the message loud and clear, the neighbouring city of Herat surrendered and was spared.

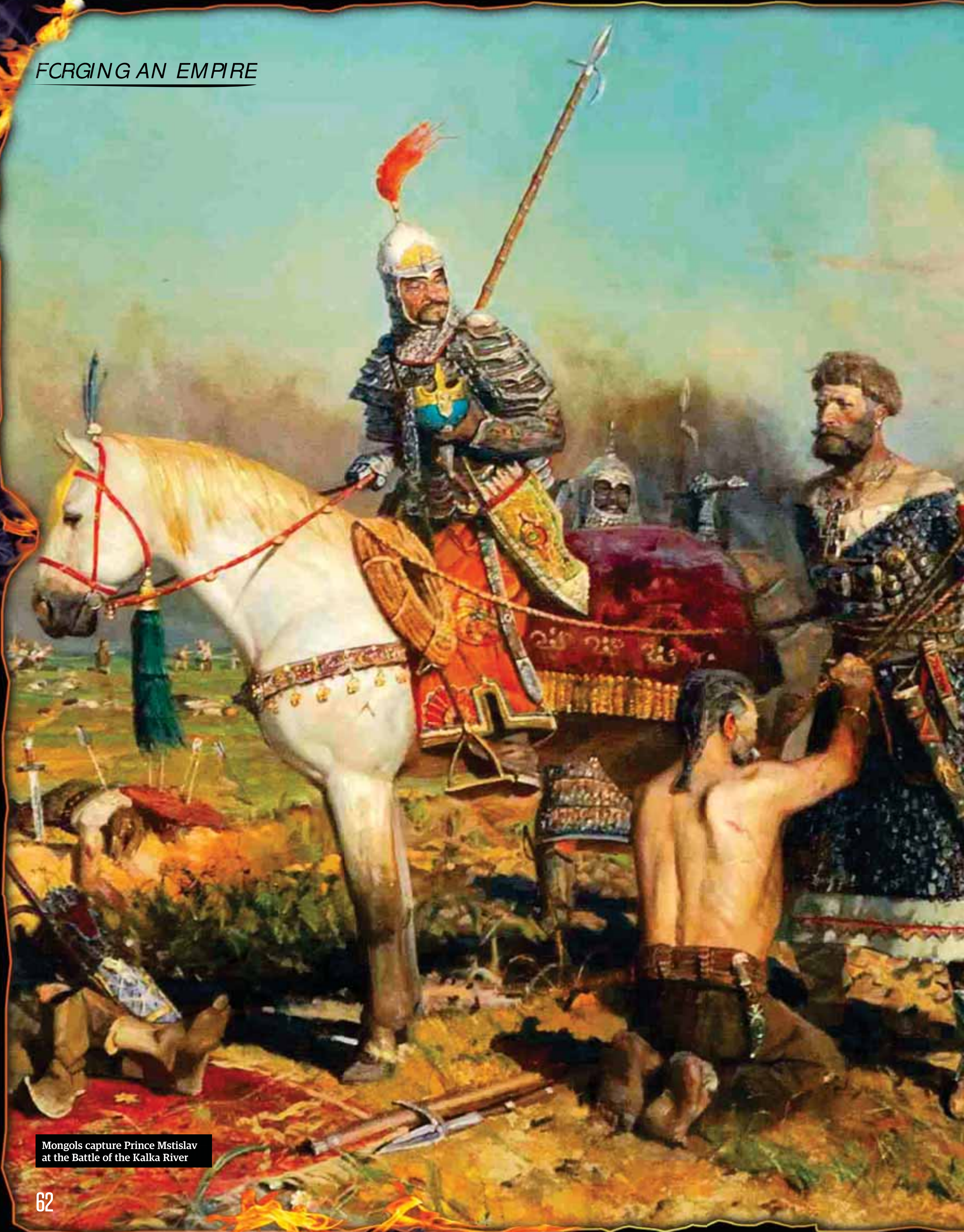
However, in Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush, the shah's son, Jalal, was doubling down, raising an army of Afghan and Pashtun tribesmen. At Bamiyan, the resistance dealt the Mongols a serious blow, killing Genghis' favourite grandson, a crime for which the city's entire population was later massacred. A brilliant general, Jalal scored a spectacular victory over 30,000 Mongols at the Battle of Parwan, Afghanistan, before being chased down and crushed by Genghis himself. In the Khan's absence, Jalal's brief victory inspired a series of ill-conceived uprisings across several Mongol-held cities. In Herat, a group of guerrilla fighters supposedly lived on sugar raided from Chinese caravans before resorting to cannibalism. Having broken the resistance, the Mongols took their time putting down these revolts, spending weeks butchering and levelling entire cities until the land reeked of death.

Chronicles tell of millions being killed in Herat and Nishapur, and though these numbers are certainly exaggerated, they attest to a level of destruction and suffering on a scale never experienced before. With the collapse of Persia's underground irrigation systems, whole regions were driven back to the desert.

Having inflicted a deep wound on the region and, content he had sufficiently broken Khwarezmia, Genghis was keen to return to China and Mongolia. After a brutal blitzkrieg campaign, he enjoyed some downtime in the Hindu Kush, summoning a Chinese sage in May 1222 to discuss the Philosopher's Stone and immortality. That autumn he studied Islam at Bukhara, enjoying much of what he heard, though the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca contradicted his belief that the whole world was the House of God. In the winter, he had the imams of Samarkand pray for him instead of the Khwarezmian prince and exempted the imams and judges from taxation, establishing a tradition of religious tolerance. The next spring he set off across the River Jaxartes, spending two years hunting on the steppes of western Turkestan, before finally leaving for Mongolia in the spring of 1225.

Strategically constructed on a hilltop, the ancient ruins of Khwarazm dominate the surrounding oasis

Images: Alamy (all); except Getty Images (Khwarazm ruins & Uzbekistani.com)



Mongols capture Prince Mstislav
at the Battle of the Kalka River

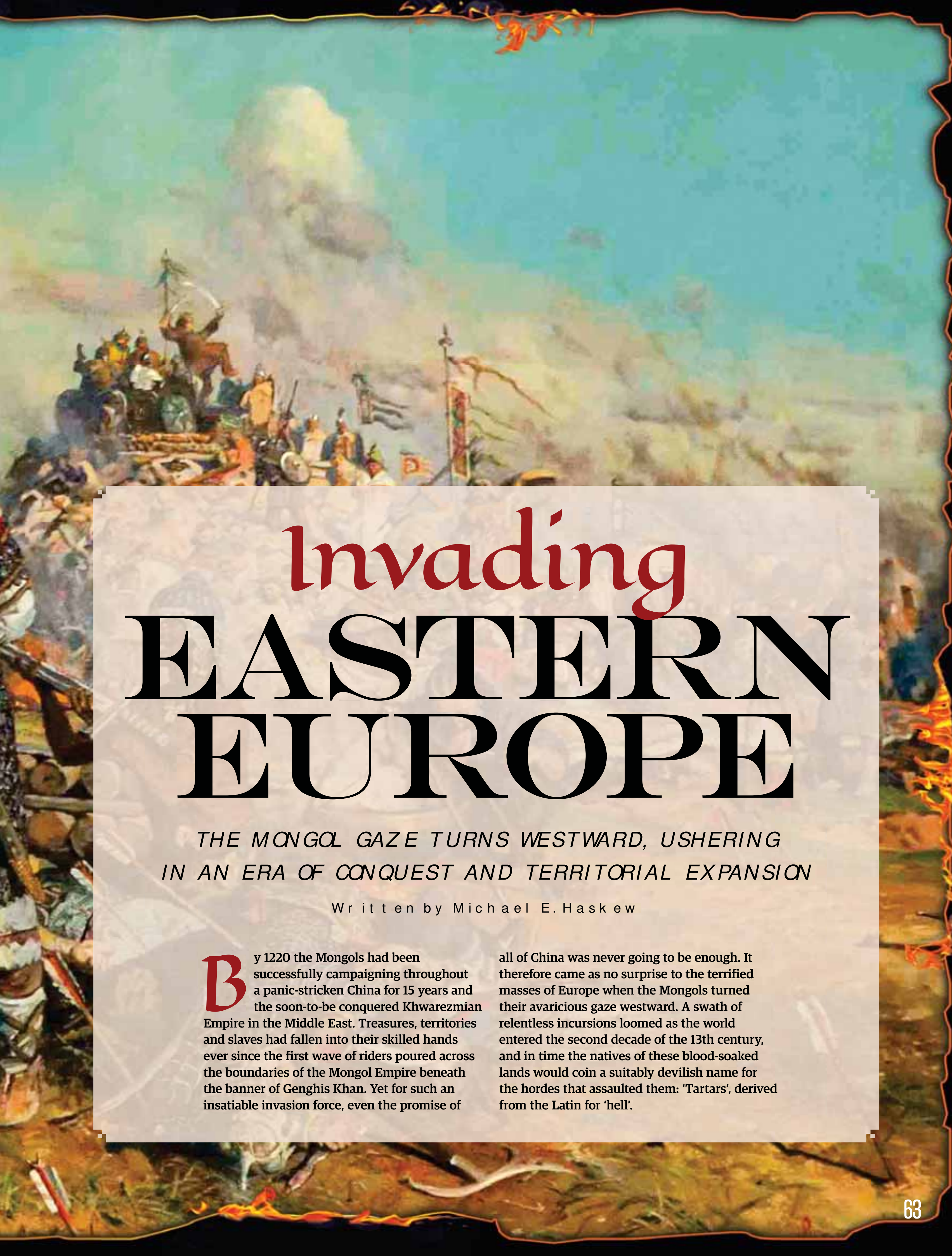


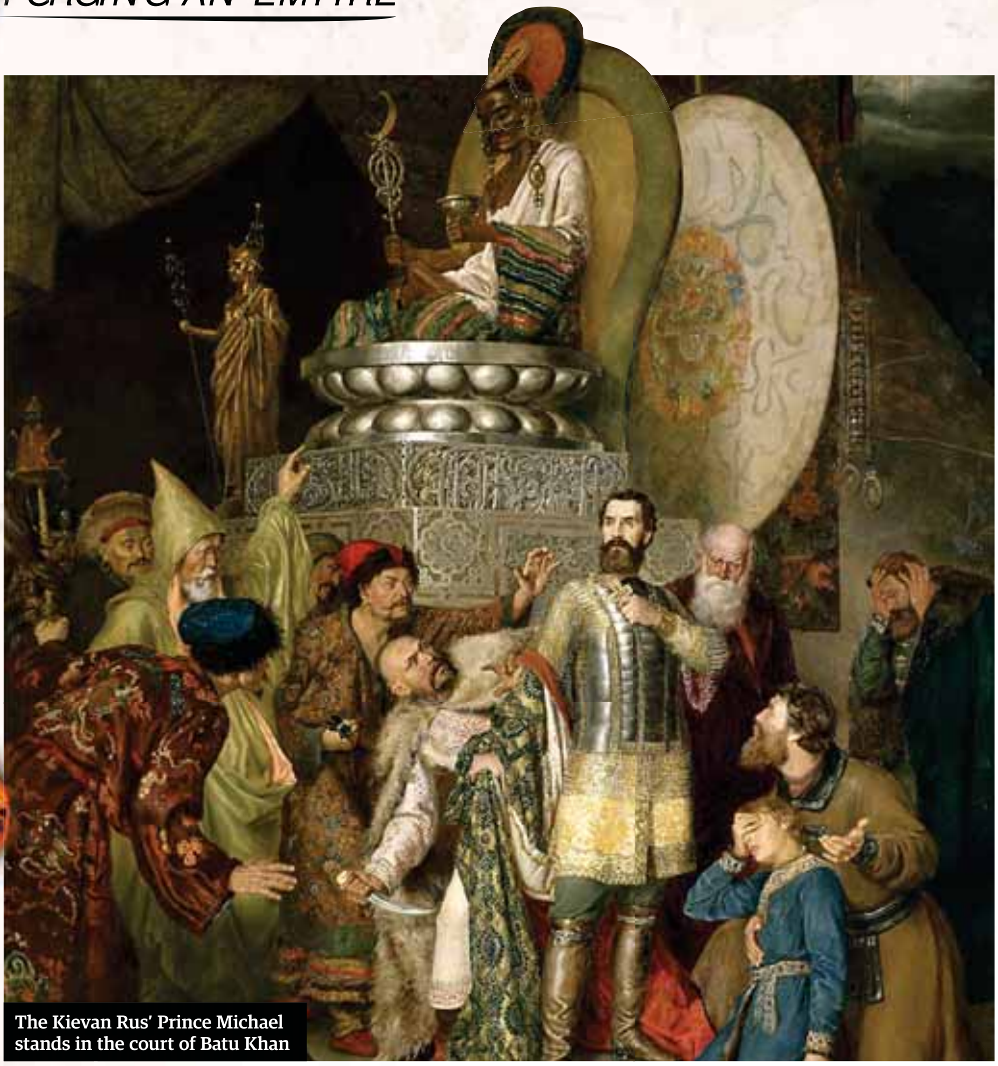
Image: Alamy

Invading EASTERN EUROPE

THE MONGOL GAZE TURNS WESTWARD, USHERING IN AN ERA OF CONQUEST AND TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

Written by Michael E. Haskew

By 1220 the Mongols had been successfully campaigning throughout a panic-stricken China for 15 years and the soon-to-be conquered Khwarezmian Empire in the Middle East. Treasures, territories and slaves had fallen into their skilled hands ever since the first wave of riders poured across the boundaries of the Mongol Empire beneath the banner of Genghis Khan. Yet for such an insatiable invasion force, even the promise of all of China was never going to be enough. It therefore came as no surprise to the terrified masses of Europe when the Mongols turned their avaricious gaze westward. A swath of relentless incursions loomed as the world entered the second decade of the 13th century, and in time the natives of these blood-soaked lands would coin a suitably devilish name for the hordes that assaulted them: 'Tartars', derived from the Latin for 'hell'.



The Kievan Rus' Prince Michael stands in the court of Batu Khan

CONQUERING THE RUS' LANDS

MONGOL INVADERS RETURNED TO THE RUS' LANDS IN 1237, MOUNTING A RUTHLESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE PRINCIPALITIES

Before the first Mongol incursion into the Rus' Lands in 1221, Köten, a chieftain of the nomadic Kipchak peoples in the region of the Dnieper River, warned his son-in-law Mstislav of Galich, a Kievan ruler, "Today they will slaughter us. Tomorrow they will come for you." His words would prove to be hauntingly prophetic.

In 1235, Ögedei Khan unleashed a Mongol army under Batu Khan to wage a western campaign to subjugate Central Asia and Europe. Within two years the Mongols again reached the Rus' Lands. During their advance, the city of Bilär in Volga Bulgaria was besieged for 45 days in 1236 and then utterly destroyed. By the winter of 1237, the Mongols were poised to assault the Russian principalities across the natural barrier of the River Volga. Batu divided his army, with part of his forces placed under the command of Subutai, who led them in the seizure of the city of Ryazan on the great river in December, the population of which was massacred in a horrendous killing spree.

Exploiting the inability of the Kievan Rus' princes to coalesce against the grave danger, Subutai proceeded to besiege Vladimir, the capital city of the Rostov-Suzdal Principality, which fell in a few weeks. Meanwhile, Batu advanced to Novgorod. In 1240, victory followed victory, and Kiev fell in December, its people massacred as the ruling duke fled to Hungary.

By the end of 1241 Batu had conquered the Rus' Lands, what is today essentially northern Ukraine and western Russia. The conquest of the Rus' Lands provided a springboard for further advances into Eastern Europe. On the heels of his military successes, Batu established the Golden Horde, which would come to dominate the region for the next 250 years.

Assault on Poland

INTENDED AS A LIMITED INCURSION, THE MONGOL INVASION OF POLAND PRODUCED DAZZLING RESULTS

With a conquering wind at their backs, the Mongols under Batu and Subutai were poised to unleash their avalanche of military might on Eastern Europe by early 1241.

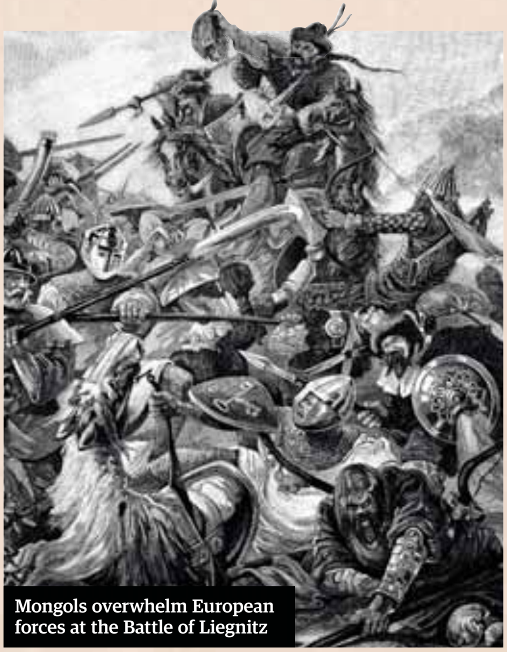
Subutai devised an offensive to secure the flanks of the invasion and strike deep into the heart of Europe. With 130,000 men, he proposed sending 20,000 under Baidar and Kadan, cousins of Batu, into Poland. Their shield would protect the remaining Mongol forces invading Hungary from a counterstroke out of the north. Remarkably, the Europeans were oblivious to the looming threat, and the Mongols realised that a winter campaign would enhance the element of surprise.

Moving northwest into Poland, the Mongol army divided after crossing the River Vistula. While Kadan advanced on Mazovia, Baidar struck the city of Kraków, which fell into his hands like a ripe plum. Prince Bolesław the Chaste abandoned the city, and Baidar swept in, his soldiers killing and looting with gusto while burning the heart of the city.

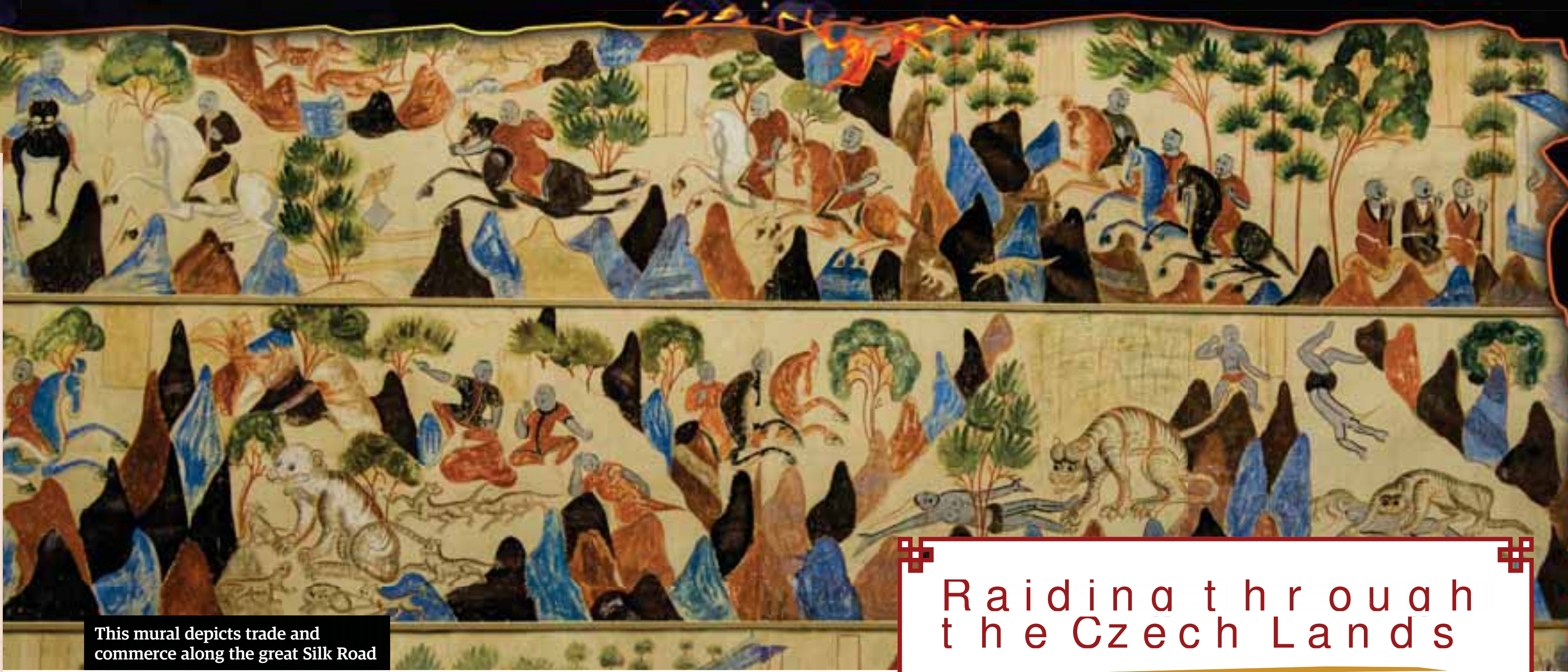
Vladimir, commanding the Polish army tasked with defending Kraków, was lured from his defences, chasing an enemy he believed to be in retreat only to ride straight into a trap set at the village of Chmielnik, where the Poles were slaughtered. Baidar then besieged Breslau but abandoned the effort when word arrived that Duke Henry of Silesia had raised 30,000 men, among them Teutonic Knights and troops under Polish barons. King Wenceslaus I of Bohemia was en route with more men to join Henry, who was only 60 kilometres from the Mongols.

The Mongols rode swiftly to Liegnitz, their adversary's rendezvous point. They reached the town in southwest Poland hours ahead of the king and attacked Henry's army on 9 April 1241. Using their famed false retreat tactic, the Mongols turned on their opponents, deploying smoke to obscure their own movements, and wiped out Henry's force. The Duke was killed, his head severed and displayed on a pole.

Unrelenting, Baidar and Kadan harassed Wenceslaus as he turned back to Bohemia. Having accomplished their mission, they subsequently pillaged their way towards Hungary to rejoin Subutai and Batu. Before the end of the 13th century the Mongols would invade Poland twice more.



Mongols overwhelm European forces at the Battle of Liegnitz



This mural depicts trade and commerce along the great Silk Road

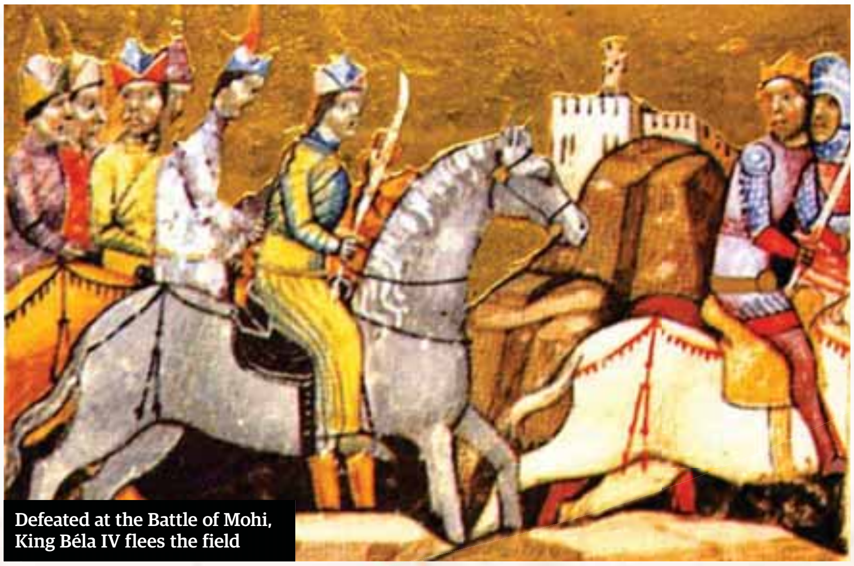
THE SUBJUGATION OF HUNGARY

WHILE SCYTHING THROUGH HUNGARY THE MONGOLS WON A DECISIVE VICTORY AT MOHI

Hungarian King Béla IV was already beset with the Cumans, nomadic refugees who had fled the Mongol onslaught in the east and begun raiding in his lands, when the alarm was raised. The Mongol army under Subutai and Batu was coming like a tidal wave.

The invaders justified their assault because the Cumans were technically Mongol subjects; however, the reality was simply the satisfaction of their own continuing lust for conquest. Béla was further obliged to contend with discontent in the ranks of his army, some men concerned for their homes and families as the Cumans raided, but he was determined to resist.

Meanwhile, Subutai and Batu advanced in three columns, penetrating the Carpathian Mountains and driving into Wallachia and Moldavia. When opposing forces met, skirmishes broke out, and each side claimed a small victory here and there. Still, the Mongol juggernaut approached, and Béla decided to confront it moving 100,000 knights and infantry towards the village of Mohi along the Sajó River. Word soon reached the Mongol leaders that their northern flank in Poland was secure, and Batu, after hearing of Béla's foray on to open ground, prepared to launch a surprise attack. The resulting battle would end in the almost complete destruction of Béla's army.



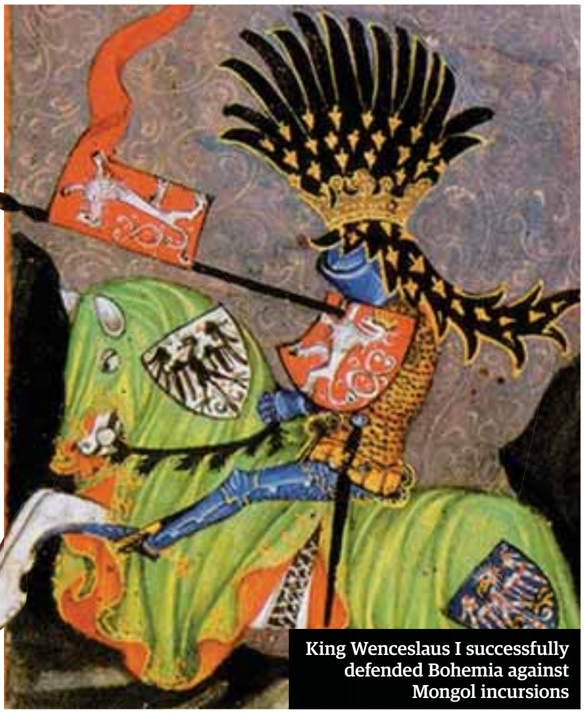
Defeated at the Battle of Mohi, King Béla IV flees the field

Raiding through the Czech Lands

THE MARAUDING MONGOLS RAVAGED SILESIA AND MORAVIA BUT REACHED HIGH TIDE IN BOHEMIA

En route to rejoin Subutai and Batu, who were actively campaigning in Hungary, the victorious Mongols under Kadan and Baidar pressed on through Silesia and Moravia, killing, burning and seizing booty. Meanwhile, King Wenceslaus I, hearing of Duke Henry's devastating defeat at Liegnitz, retired to the natural barrier of the Bohemian mountains, harried along the way by advancing Mongol horsemen. As he trudged towards what he hoped would be sanctuary Wenceslaus augmented his army with troops from Thuringia and Saxony. A contingent of soldiers from Austria later joined him as well.

Once ensconced in their mountain strongholds, the Europeans were able to impede the Mongols' use of cavalry, superb shock troops who were at their best on the broad, open steppes. The stout defences prepared by Wenceslaus dissuaded the Mongols from an all-out attack, and they retired to the town of Othmachau, mounting raids that were successfully held at bay by the Europeans. A Mongol attempt to capture the city of Olomouc was also unsuccessful. The skilful defence in the mountains of Bohemia spared the region from the devastation that surrounding areas had suffered. Frustrated but nevertheless enriched, Kadan and Baidar led Mongol raids through Moravia as they withdrew towards Subutai and Batu in Hungary.



King Wenceslaus I successfully defended Bohemia against Mongol incursions

Images: Getty Images (Russia, Poland); Alamy (Silk Road mural)

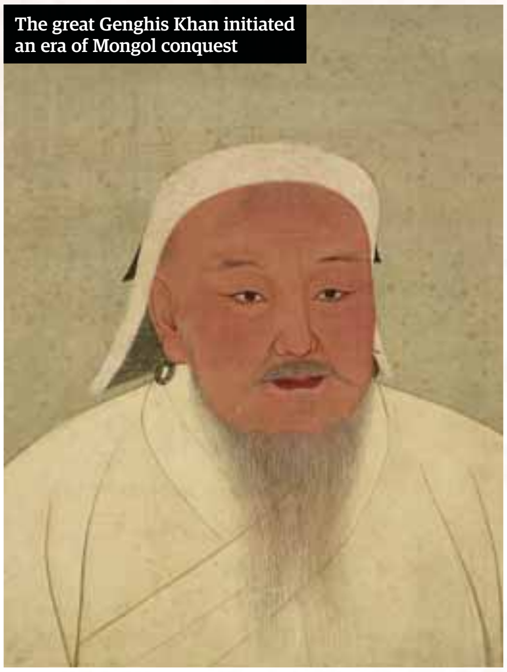
Adventure in Austria

DUKE FREDERICK II SUCCESSFULLY REPULSED THE MONGOL INCURSION INTO AUSTRIA

The victory at Mohi opened the door for Mongol probing operations in Austria and potentially into the heart of Central Europe. After crossing into the realm of Austrian Duke Frederick II, the Mongols raided the city of Wiener Neustadt south of Vienna in 1241. Although their entire army was not committed to the advance, the Mongol raiding party sowed fear and confusion among the populace, pillaging and slaughtering those who opposed them. Frederick, however, was a veteran of previous fights with the invaders who had survived the catastrophe at Mohi and cobbled together an alliance that included his capable Austrian knights and soldiers from neighbouring regions. Frederick's army wiped out the small Mongol raiding party and held the line against further incursions. Soon word reached the Mongols in the field that Ögedei Khan had died, and they withdrew to begin the long trek eastward to participate in the election of a new great khan.

> "Frederick's army wiped out the Mongol party"

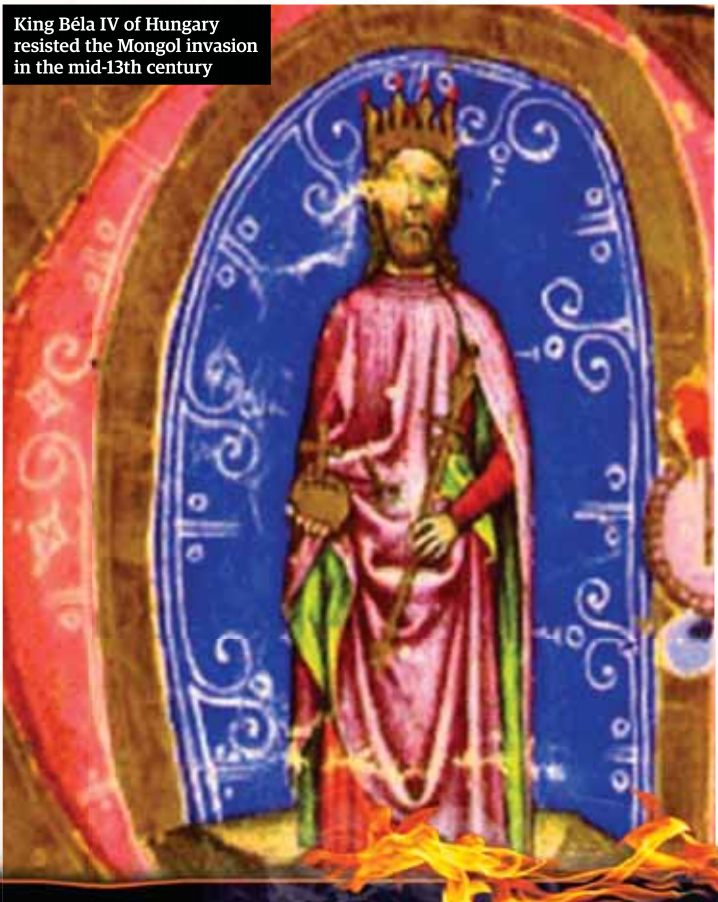
Also known as Frederick the Quarrelsome, Duke Frederick II died in battle in June 1246



The great Genghis Khan initiated an era of Mongol conquest

1.5km wide at its broadest and up to 8m deep, the Danube is a formidable obstacle

Danube
Black Sea
Adriatic Sea
Tyrrhenian Sea



King Béla IV of Hungary resisted the Mongol invasion in the mid-13th century

A TURN TOWARDS CROATIA

CARRYING THEIR WINTER CAMPAIGN INTO CROATIA, THE MONGOLS CROSSED THE FROZEN DANUBE

Following the Battle of Mohi, the Mongols took advantage of the harshest winter in memory in late 1241, crossing the great River Danube only when they were assured that the ice was thick enough to support their ponies and siege weaponry. Sweeping rapidly through western Hungary, the powerful army again split as Kadan, one of the heroes of the campaign in Poland, led 20,000 men into Croatia.

While in pursuit of King Béla IV in his flight to Austria, the Mongols sacked the city of Zagreb. After suffering extensive casualties while attacking the fortification at the city of Klis, Kadan pursued Béla into Dalmatia, where the king found temporary refuge with his subjects in various towns.

The Mongol force, probably under strength for a fighting campaign, suffered defeats in battles with forces loyal to Béla. It is likely that the Mongol objective was the capture of the king rather than the subjugation of Croatia.

While Béla managed to escape, Croatia was plundered as the Mongols pulled back. A desperate stand by the Croat army may have occurred at Grobnik Field in 1242, where the defenders were said to have inflicted a decisive defeat on the Mongols of the Golden Horde. However, evidence of such a battle is inconclusive.

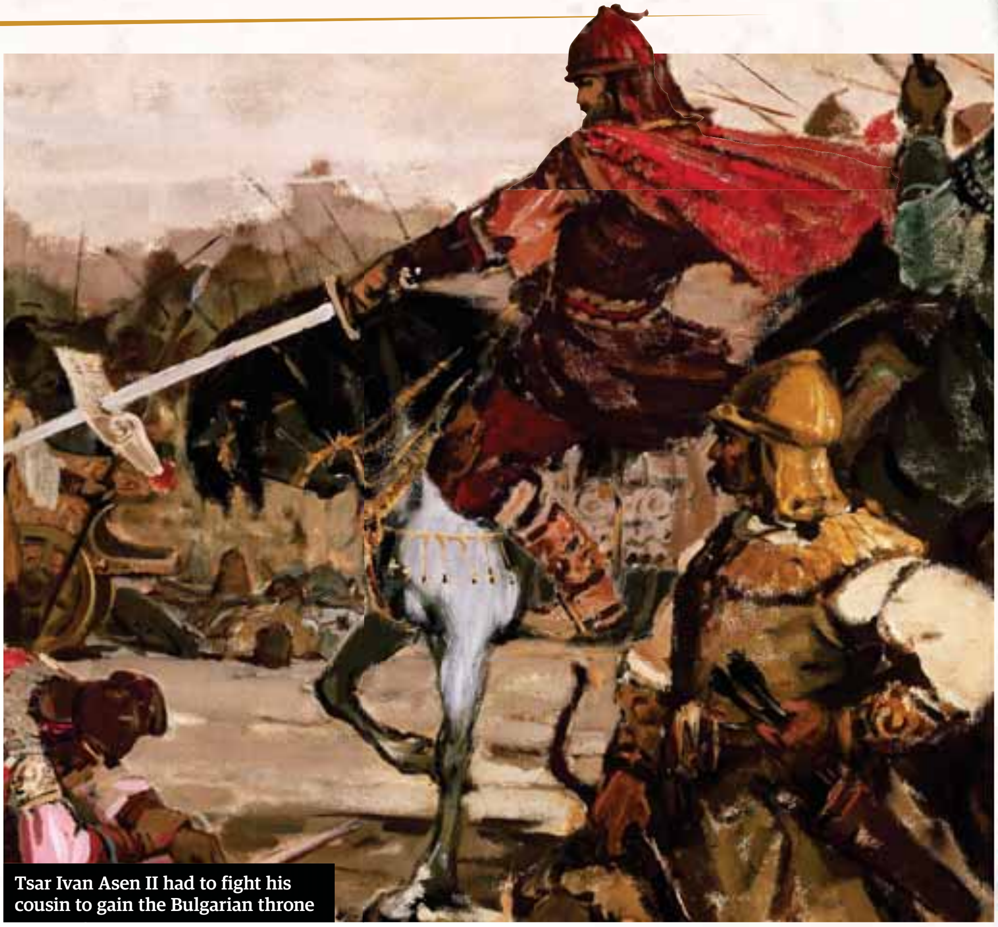
INTERLUDE IN BULGARIA

DURING THEIR EASTWARD WITHDRAWAL, A CONTINGENT OF MONGOLS RAIDED BULGARIA

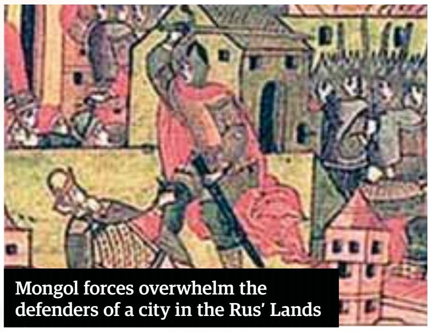
The record of the Mongol invasion of Bulgaria is somewhat obscure. Indications are that the region was devastated by a Mongol invasion in 1242 as two armies – under Batu and Kadan – converged, later sacking the capital city of Tarnovo and the port of Anchialos after defeating their Bulgarian defenders.

> "By the mid-13th century Bulgaria was paying tribute"

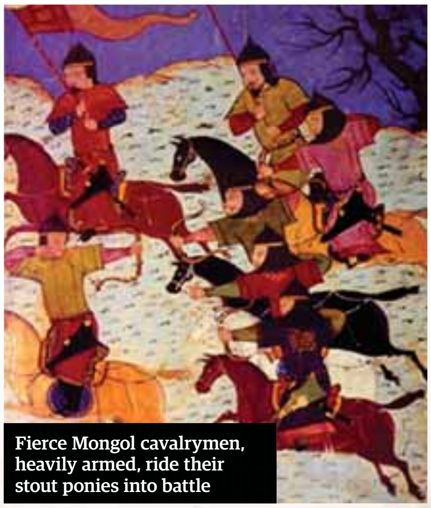
While Bulgaria may have been subjugated by the Mongols early in their campaign into Eastern and Central Europe, it is known that once the invading tide began to recede they could not resist sending a portion of their army into the region, and some scholars assert that the Mongol invasion of Bulgaria stretched into 1243. Further evidence exists to support the idea that a Bulgarian army led by Tsar Ivan Asen II defeated a Mongol force, but whether that Mongol contingent was anything more than a raiding party is lost to history. Sources do confirm that by the mid-13th century the Bulgarian monarchy was paying tribute to the Mongols.



Tsar Ivan Asen II had to fight his cousin to gain the Bulgarian throne



Mongol forces overwhelm the defenders of a city in the Rus' Lands



Fierce Mongol cavalrymen, heavily armed, ride their stout ponies into battle

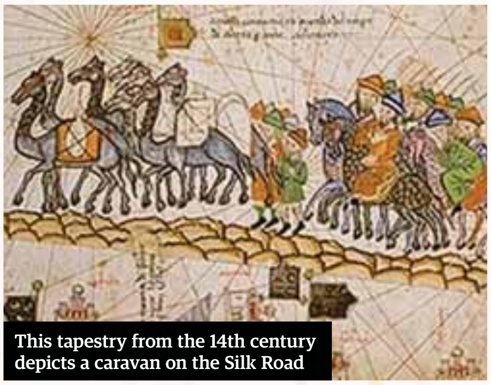
It wasn't all blood and booty

WHILE THE MONGOL INVASION OF EUROPE WAS A RUTHLESS OPERATION THAT KILLED HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS, IT DID ALSO INCREASE TRADE, THE EXCHANGE OF TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE REGION

The Mongol invasion of Europe in the 13th century laid waste to the status quo across much of the continent. While conquered territories remained in servitude to their Mongol masters for years, the influence of the invaders from the east lingered after their empire passed into history. The centre of power in Russia, for example, shifted northwards, giving rise to such notable figures as Prince Alexander Nevsky, a vassal of the Mongols who nevertheless exercised a significant degree of autonomy.

The Mongols' presence also bridged the cultural gap between East and West, facilitating the flow of technology, scientific information and cultural diversity. Among the commodities that became well known in the West were gunpowder, paper and the compass, and the process of printing was introduced. Strange animals, plants and foods were also transported to the continent.

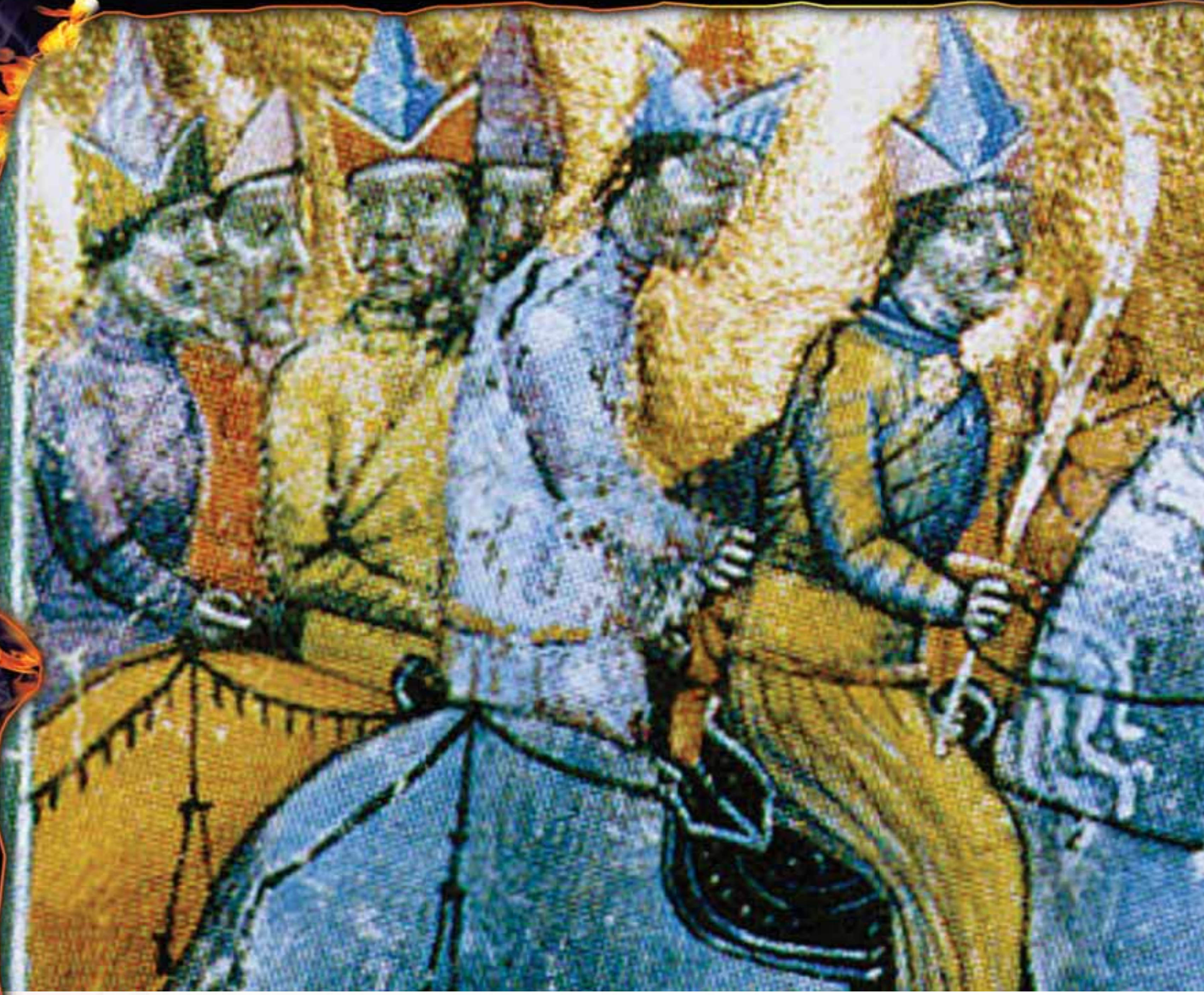
Thanks to the Mongols trade flourished along the fabled Silk Road as emissaries from previously unknown worlds reached out while merchants, adventurers and explorers sought new frontiers. The Mongols kept the Silk Road safe from marauding bandits because it generated tax revenue from commerce.



This tapestry from the 14th century depicts a caravan on the Silk Road

On top of the economic benefits of the Mongols' raids came religious bonuses, namely the Mongol practice of religious tolerance, which allowed for cultural exchange and freedom of expression during a period that has been called the 'Pax Mongolica'.

Images: Alamy (Croatia); Getty Images (Bulgaria); Shannon CC BY-SA 4.0 (Danube map)



Battle of MOHI

WHEN? 10-11 April 1241

WHERE? Sajó River, near Mohi, Hungary

Written by CHARLES GINGER

The Mongol Empire's assault on Hungary in 1241 was not inevitable. Despite their reputation for unleashing panic and bloodshed on an epic scale, the Mongols did at first attempt to reason with the state they would soon seek to crush, but, as was so often the case during the medieval period, the path of diplomacy was a short one. Unfortunately for Hungary and its proud king, the road to recovery would be anything but.

Since their crushing victory over a contingent of Rus' principalities at the Battle of the Kalka River in 1223, the Mongols were confident in their ability to fight their way deeper into a Europe just beginning to appreciate the terror that had swept throughout central Asia since 1206.

Eager to follow in the footsteps of his father Genghis, in 1235 Ögedei Khan ordered Batu Khan (leader of the Golden Horde) to conquer Rus', a network of states in eastern Europe. By November 1240 Batu's armies had slashed their way to Kiev, sacking the city and killing its 50,000 citizens.

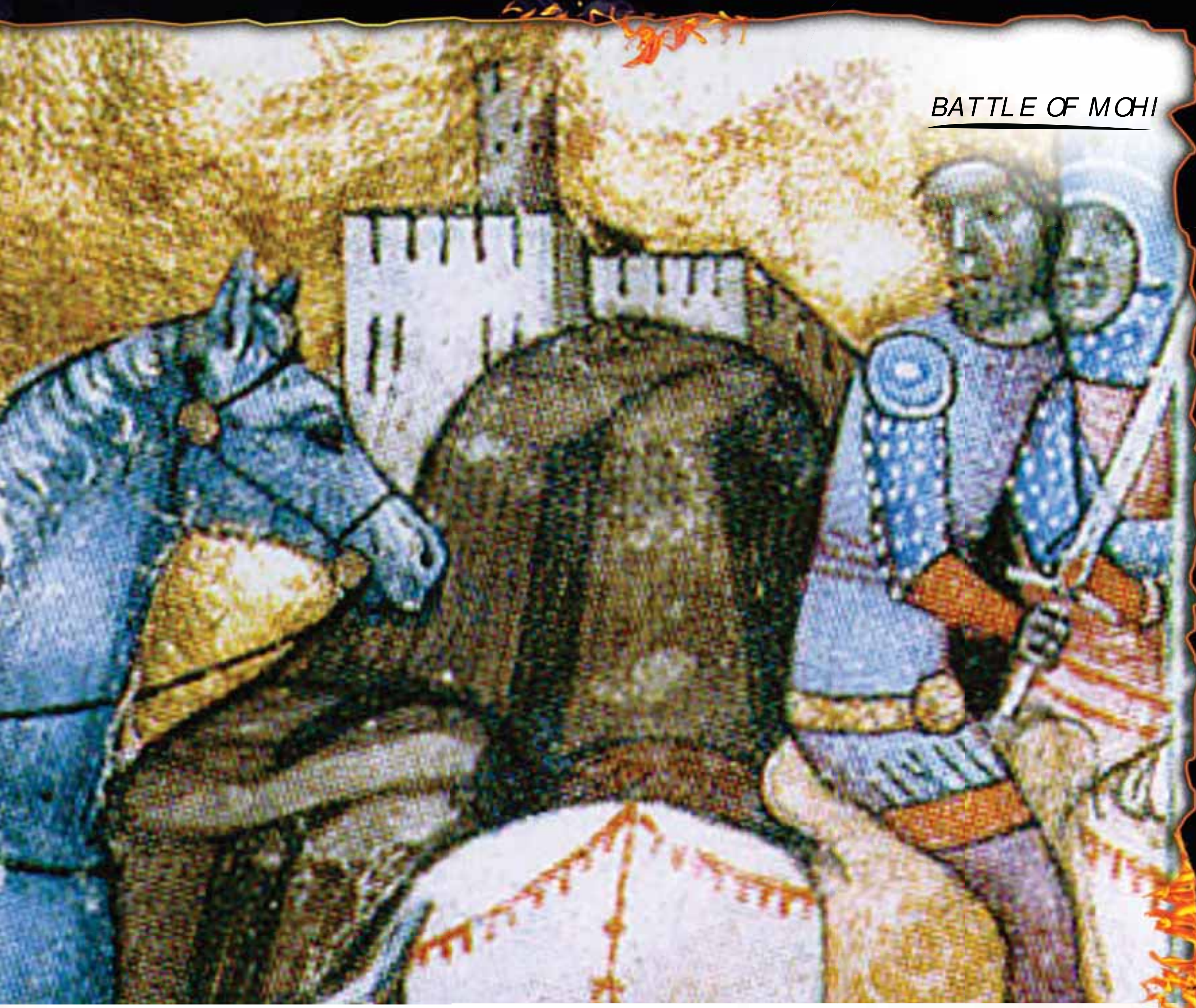


Image: Alamy

In the same year as the razing of Kiev, Mongol ambassadors were dispatched to Pest to parlay with King Béla IV. The reason for their journey was the recent influx of Cuman refugees into the country following the Mongols' subjugation of their home. Regarding the Cumans as their rightful slaves, the Mongols implored Béla to force the Cumans to return home and submit. However, by now many of the Cumans who had sought sanctuary in Béla's lands had been integrated into the Hungarian army, a welcome levy of fighters that Béla wished to keep. Dismissing their overtures, he rebuffed the Mongols.

Enraged by Béla's refusal to hand over the Cumans, the Mongols now had their casus belli, and preparations for the conquest of Hungary were drawn up by the greatest strategist in the Mongol army: Subutai.

Responsible for the entire Mongol advance into Europe, Subutai took every opportunity to install spies throughout newly taken territories, informants who provided him with information on the political and military landscape of states yet to be brought to heel. His foresight would soon pay off handsomely for the Mongols.

For his part, Béla was not naïve to the threat his kingdom now confronted. Realising that the Mongols would not accept being ignored, he summoned his forces to Pest. The chaos that ensued would prove a portent of things to come.

Widely hated by most nobles due to his domestic policies, many prominent figures ignored Béla's commands. Their insubordination was further compounded by the murder of the Cumans' leader, a man who had been placed under Béla's protection since he fled to Hungary. The news of the killing sparked a Cuman uprising that saw them desert the army and pillage their way through much of southwest Hungary, pinning down indispensable troops as they went.

The situation was unfortunately little better outside of Hungary's borders. Poland, a long-time target of the Golden Horde, soon found itself struggling to fight off a Mongol incursion, meaning it was in no position to support Béla.

Devoid of the heavy cavalry usually provided by the nobles and with Mongol soldiers swarming into Transylvania, Béla's hopes of taking the fight to the enemy were fading by the day. In fact, such was his luck that when help finally did arrive it did nothing but hinder, Duke Frederick II of Austria's minor victories over some Mongol raiding parties only serving to make Béla appear craven. The fact that Frederick then promptly turned tail and rode for home seems to have passed Béla's critics by.

With the icy grip of winter receding, the spring of 1241 loomed large: campaigning season, and not a moment too soon. Disrupted at every turn, Hungary's beleaguered monarch now had little choice but to pursue the Mongols. His desperation to rid central Europe of the Mongol scourge (three Mongol armies had now punctured Hungary's borders) would play right into Subutai's hands.

Since the dawn of the expansion of the Mongol Empire its wily warriors had often deployed a cunning tactic to lure opponents into a trap: the feigned retreat. Whether through ignorance or arrogance, King Béla failed to grasp that he was set to be the next victim of this ploy when Subutai began to pull his forces back from the outskirts of Pest. Eager to shake the label of coward that had recently been bestowed upon him, Béla readily sent his men after them.

On the morning of 10 April the Hungarian army was ordered to make camp near the village of Mohi just south of the Sajó River in northwest Hungary. Weary from a week of forced marching, Béla's men were only too happy to halt. A series of wagons were quickly chained together to create a circular fort inside which the troops could set up camp and watch for the enemy. It wasn't long before they sighted them.

Sent forwards to get a better look at the enemy, a small gathering of Mongol troops was spotted on the far bank of the Sajó on the afternoon of the 10th. Fortunately for them the Hungarian scouts dispatched to cross the bridge that forded the river and apprehend them were halted by marshland, their inability to close on the Mongol spies leaving Béla blind to the presence of the main Mongol army just behind the woodland into which they had escaped. Subutai, on the other hand, had ensured that he would not be similarly clueless, the experienced general watching Béla's camp from a hill to the north.

> "As Hungarian guards trudged to their stations, a shape lurched into view from the direction of the river: a slave on the run"

Even so, the Mongols didn't have it all their own way. As night closed in and Hungarian guards trudged to their stations, a shape lurched into view from the direction of the river: a slave on the run. The courageous escapee was promptly marched to Béla's tent, where he revealed the Mongols' audacious plan to seize the bridge that very night. Upon hearing this grave news Béla's brother Colomon, Duke of Slavonia, hurried to prepare a detachment to secure the crossing.

Trotting out from between the tents and tables adorning the camp, Colomon's riders broke into a gallop and surged through the darkness, hoping desperately to have moved first. The sound of clinking weapons and foreign tongues up ahead shattered their hopes just seconds before they careered into Batu's vanguard, the front section of which had already begun to fan out on the Hungarian side of the river. A ferocious fight ensued as startled Mongol troops faltered beneath the onslaught of hooves and crossbow bolts. Determined to hold their ground, Batu's men slashed at the flashes of enemy they could see, but soon men began to fall, punctured by arrows or scythed down by blades. The order to fall back rose above the clamour. Colomon had succeeded in taking the bridge.

Relieved to have pried the Mongols from their position, Colomon installed a unit of infantry (complemented by crossbowmen) to guard the bridge. His men in place, Colomon rode back to camp to inform his sibling of their success.

Adaptive as ever, Subutai wasted little time in modifying his approach. Sending Shiban (Batu's brother) north to ford the river elsewhere, Subutai personally led his own contingent south to erect a pontoon and cross at another point, leaving Batu in charge of the main central force. Before departing he ordered stone-throwers forward to shower the bridge.

Unable to hold their position in the face of a sustained bombardment, those soldiers who had not been crushed by Mongol rocks broke from the bridge and rode hard for camp. No longer threatened by showers of crossbow bolts, Batu marched his men across the river once more. To his north and south Shiban and Subutai were working to do the same.

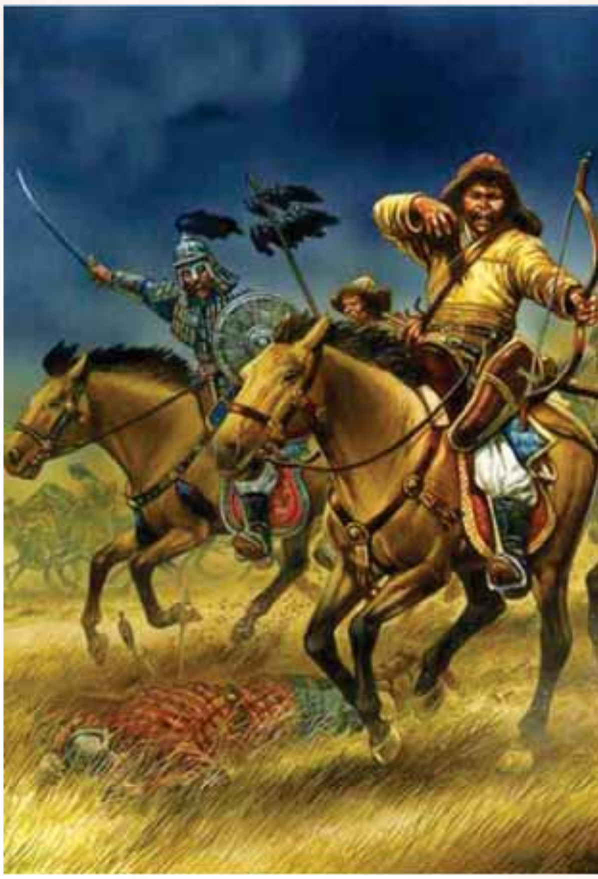
Across what was fast becoming a corpse-strewn battlefield, the remnants of Colomon's holding force streamed back into camp, their bedraggled appearances no doubt deflating morale. Undeterred, Colomon took it upon himself to lead another charge. Bellowing to his riders, he ordered the cavalry to form up and race towards the Mongol troops pouring over the Sajó.

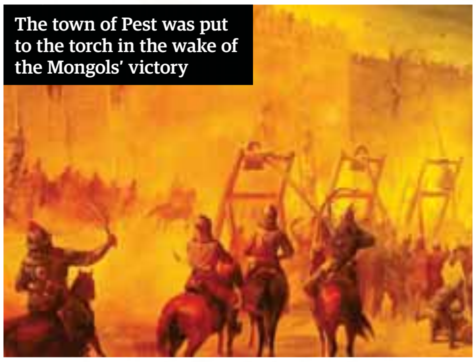
Lances lowered, the courageous chargers smashed into Batu's ranks, but this time the Mongols (most of whom were mounted) were ready. Cries of anger and anguish filled the night sky as troops on both sides stabbed and shot at one another, bolts and arrows loosing in all directions.

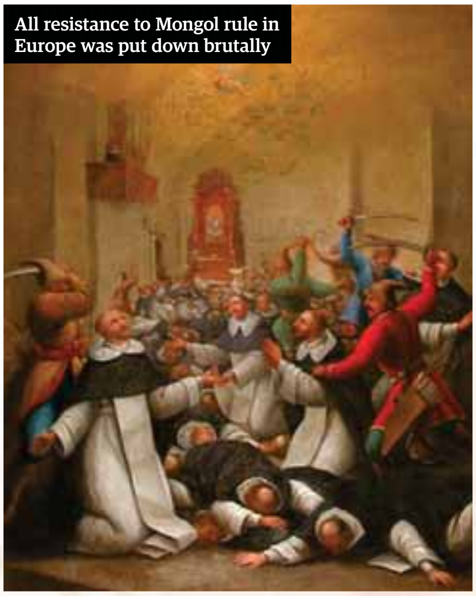
Remarkably, given the sheer weight of Mongol numbers, Colomon's cavalry began to force Batu back towards the river, turning what seemed like a strong position into an increasingly vulnerable one. But just as Batu began to run out of room Hungarian riders spotted Shiban's force, which had by now managed to cross the river, closing in from the north. Terrified of being encircled, the Hungarians were forced to relinquish the advantage and flee to safety. Still, valuable time had been bought for Béla to mobilise the bulk of the army.

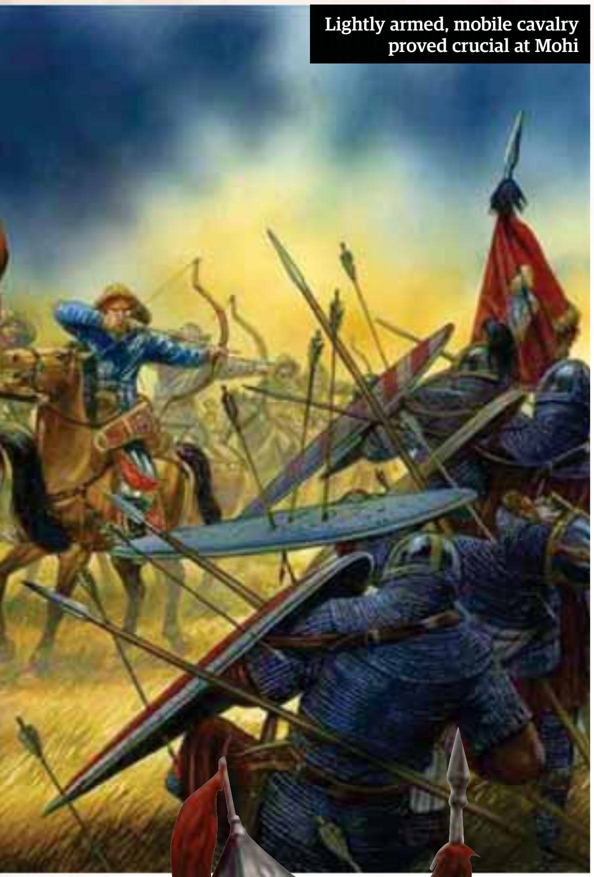
Inexplicably, King Béla had not capitalised on his brother's courage in hurrying to hem the Mongols in by readying the rest of his army, an oversight for which he was openly lambasted by Archbishop Ugolin, one of several prominent religious figures present at Mohi. Evidently embarrassed, Béla finally called his men to arms, and a patchwork formation of troops started to trickle out of the camp.

Using their heavy horses as a sledgehammer with which to crack Batu's centre, the main Hungarian force rushed into the fray, a sea of swords biting into

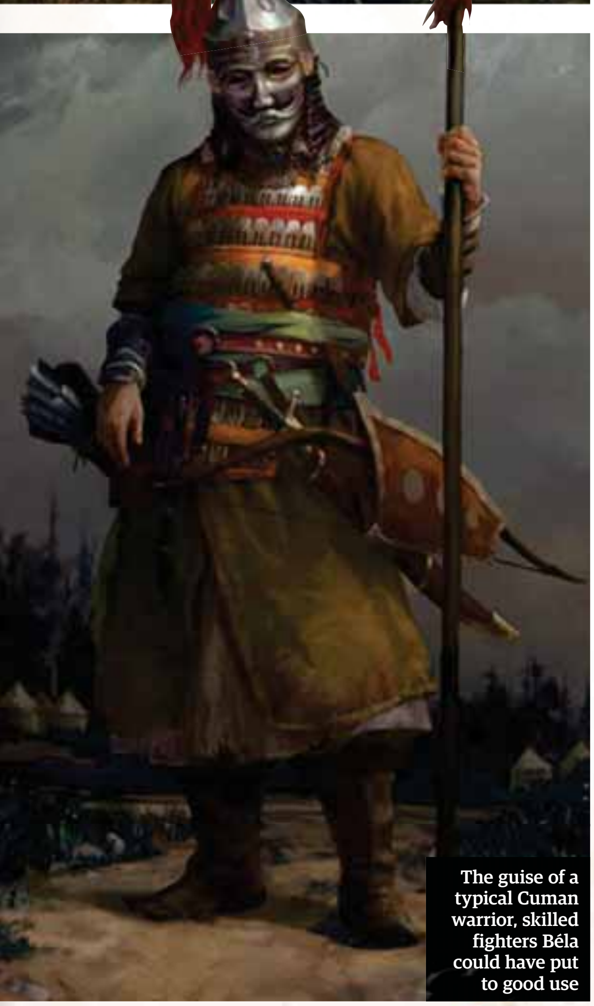



The town of Pest was put to the torch in the wake of the Mongols' victory


All resistance to Mongol rule in Europe was put down brutally



Lightly armed, mobile cavalry proved crucial at Mohi



The guise of a typical Cuman warrior, skilled fighters Béla could have put to good use

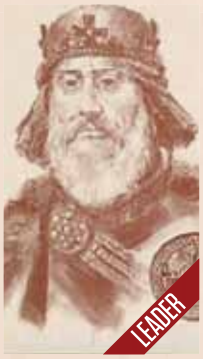
KINGDOM OF HUNGARY

NUMBER OF TROOPS

25,000

NUMBER OF LOSSES

VIRTUALLY THE ENTIRE ARMY



BÉLA IV OF HUNGARY

Crowned despite his father's reservations, Béla IV proved largely incompetent at Mohi but would recover to help shore up Hungary's defences and later be hailed as the 'second founder of the state'.

+ Led a well-equipped army ready to defend its homeland to the end.

− A poor operator in the field, he failed to grasp the initiative at any stage.

CROSSBOWMEN

A key part of a Hungarian military that favoured fighting at range, crossbowmen could provide deadly fire from a distance or at close quarters.

+ Equipped with precise and powerful weapons, crossbowmen were devastating at close range.

− Cumbersome weaponry and little armour left archers exposed if charged.

CROSSBOW

Normally constructed from the wood of an ash or yew tree, crossbows were weighty weapons, but their locking mechanism meant less exertion on the shooter.

+ Crossbows generated more power than the Mongol composite bows.

− Slow reload times meant crossbowmen could only fire two to three bolts a minute.

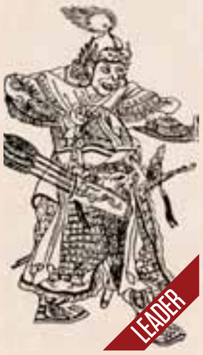
GOLDEN HORDE OF THE MONGOLS

NUMBER OF TROOPS

20,000

NUMBER OF LOSSES

A FEW HUNDRED



SUBUTAI 'THE VALIANT'

Hailed as one of Genghis' dogs of war, Subutai served the empire brilliantly. Previous to Mohi (his 65th battle) Subutai had been triumphant in as many as 60 engagements.

+ A brilliant military strategist with years of experience in fighting abroad.

− Faced a stubborn opponent on difficult terrain.

CAVALRY

The heartbeat of the Mongol military, light cavalry proved beyond doubt at Mohi that speed and agility could best heavier riders.

+ Fast and mobile, these highly skilled riders made for a dynamic army.

− Lightly armoured, these horsemen could be vulnerable when faced with heavily armed adversaries.

COMPOSITE BOW

Drawn using only the thumb, this curved bow would have been fashioned from bamboo and then stiffened with sinew and horn.

+ Had a range of at least 500 metres and fired arrows that penetrated all Western armour.

− Required immense strength and stamina to be fired properly and accurately.

Images: www.learninghistory.com (mobile cavalry); Bill Taroli CC BY 2.0 (photo Pest); Getty Images (crossbowman); Alamy (Golden Horde cavalry)

a wall of Mongol shields. Once more Batu's centre began to stumble back, but, desperate to avoid literally falling into a deathtrap, the invaders hit back. The fighting was evenly matched, with the fate of the entire battle hanging in the balance.

Downriver the sounds of hooves clopping on wood signalled the crossing of Subutai's men. As Batu and Shiban struggled to hold their lines, Subutai began to manoeuvre his force round to close on the Hungarian flank. Yet again faced with the prospect of entrapment, the Hungarians had little option but to withdraw.

The morning sun gleaming off their dented helms and hacked shields, the Hungarian army scurried for camp, Subutai happy to let them do so. A wagon fort would not spare them now. As the Hungarians filtered back into camp a sense of relief washed over those fortunate enough to survive the carnage. But their sense of salvation wasn't to last.

Never one to permit a trapped foe to escape, Subutai commanded his forces to surround the Hungarians, then with Béla's survivors sealed in he set his archers, stone-throwers and – according to numerous sources – Chinese firearms units to do their bloody work.

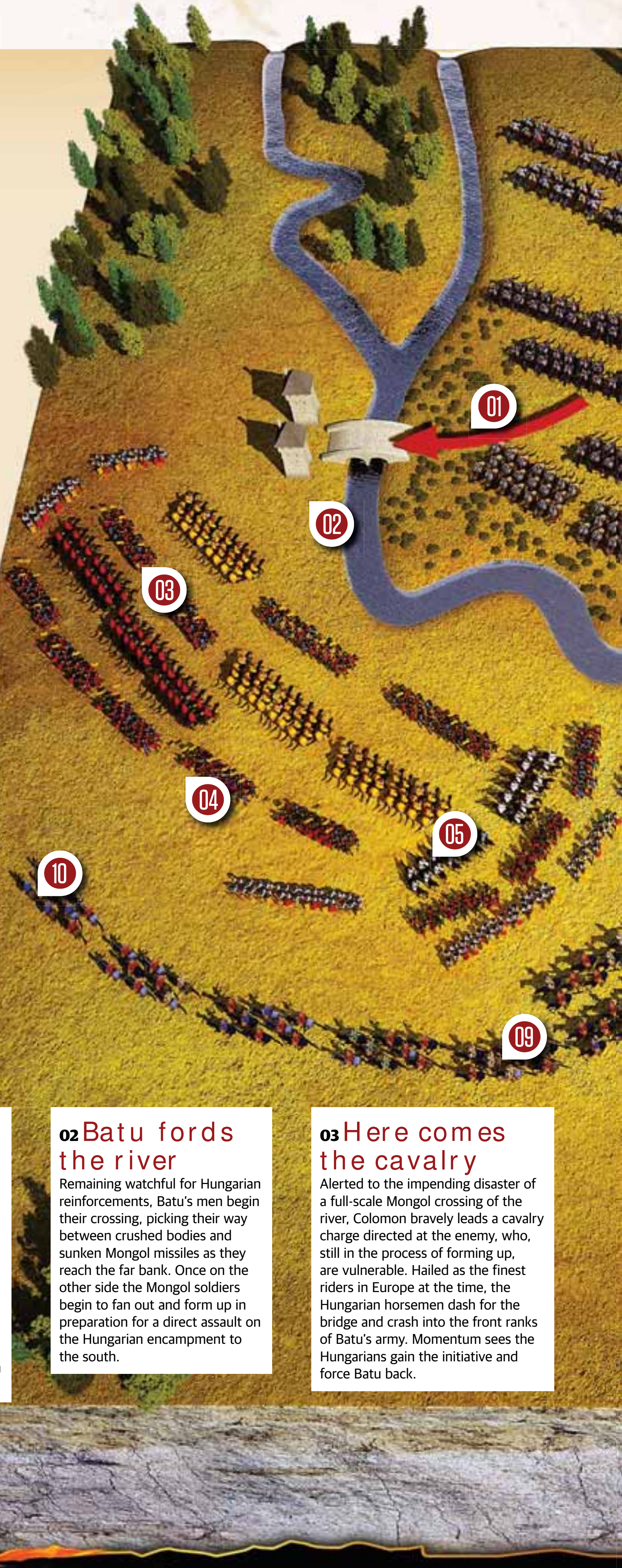
The Hungarian camp swiftly came to resemble a shot-ridden barrel filled with flailing fish. Flames licked hungrily at tents as riders crushed their comrades in a doomed bid to escape. Yet Subutai wasn't so cruel as to offer them no way out; a deliberate gap had been left by his men to the southwest of the encirclement, through which streams of panicked soldiers now flowed. Like lions stalking an injured buffalo, Mongol horsemen immediately gave chase. Virtually the entire Hungarian army was cut down, with Colomon escaping just long enough to suffer from grievous wounds that would shortly claim him, while Béla somehow managed to flee to Austria (he would later be held to ransom by Frederick II and threatened into ceding territory to his one-time ally).

Pest and its people were not so fortunate. By shunning the temptation to plunder, the Mongols (who had suffered unusually high losses, including 30 of Batu's bodyguards, known as baatars) pursued every man they could before turning their ire on Pest, which they put to the torch. Other towns met a similar fate as Subutai's armies laid claim to vast swathes of Hungary and the Carpathian Mountains. They would stay for almost a year.

The reason for the Mongol withdrawal from Hungary in the spring of 1242 is still debated, though whether Batu pulled his men out due to the death of Ögedei (all Mongol commanders were required to return home to select a new khan) or simply because he felt his work was done, the devastation left in the Mongols' wake is beyond doubt. Half of the settlements within Hungary had been destroyed, their citizens ruthlessly put to the sword in a campaign of killing that claimed between 15 and 25 per cent of Hungary's total population. Hungary faced a long way back, and in 1285 the Mongols would return to wage war on its blood-soaked lands once more.

10-11 APRIL 1241

HOW THE MONGOL EMPIRE MERCILESSLY CRUSHED THEIR HUNGARIAN ENEMIES OVER JUST TWO DAYS IN SPRING



01 Batu prepares his assault

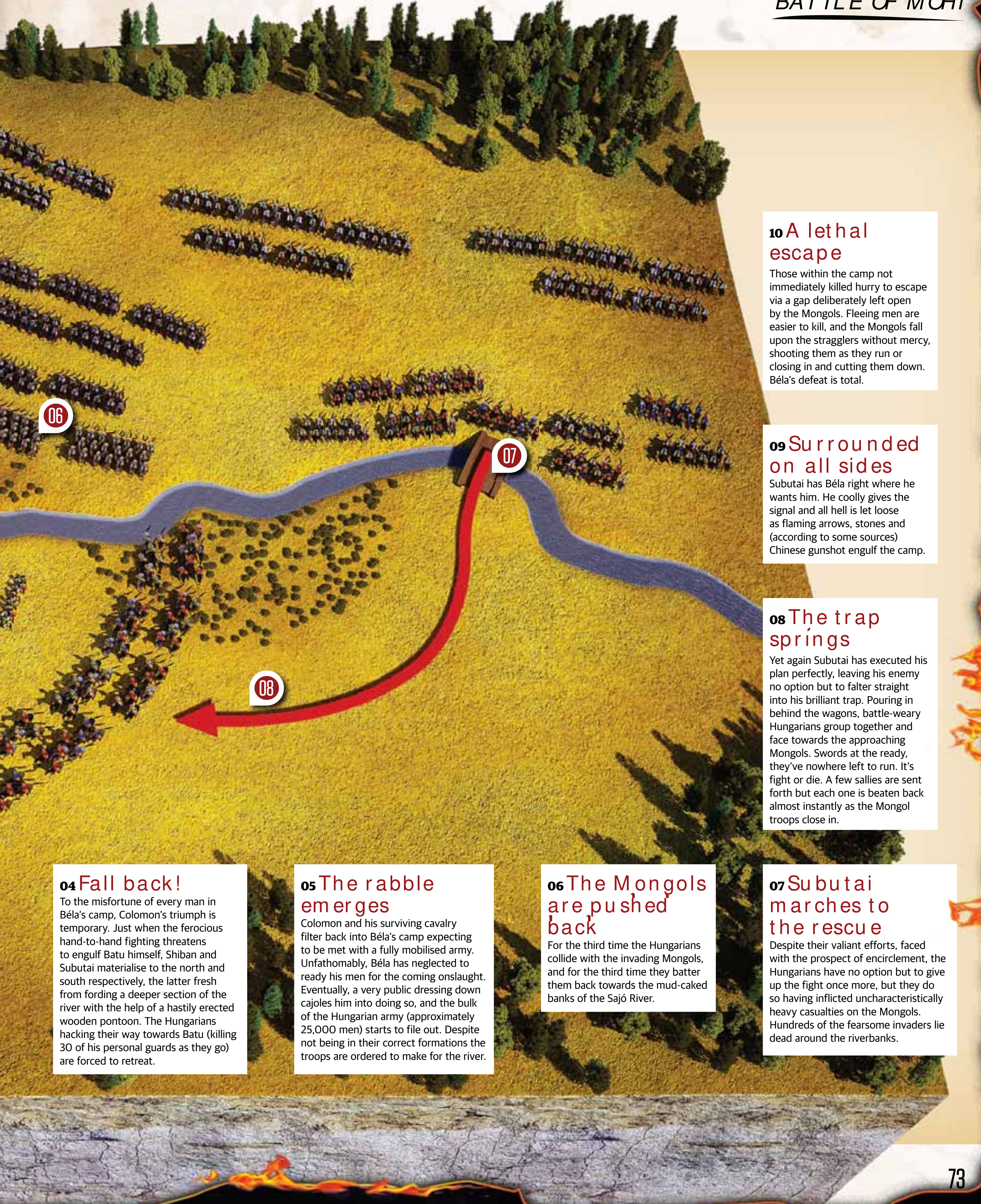
Without the bridge the Mongol advance would be dead before it begun. With Subutai having ordered the stone-throwers forwards, Batu gives the signal to pound the Hungarian bowmen holding the bridge relentlessly. Unable to respond with any siege weaponry of their own, the Hungarians are forced to abandon the position.

02 Batu fords the river

Remaining watchful for Hungarian reinforcements, Batu's men begin their crossing, picking their way between crushed bodies and sunken Mongol missiles as they reach the far bank. Once on the other side the Mongol soldiers begin to fan out and form up in preparation for a direct assault on the Hungarian encampment to the south.

03 Here comes the cavalry

Alerted to the impending disaster of a full-scale Mongol crossing of the river, Colomon bravely leads a cavalry charge directed at the enemy, who, still in the process of forming up, are vulnerable. Hailed as the finest riders in Europe at the time, the Hungarian horsemen dash for the bridge and crash into the front ranks of Batu's army. Momentum sees the Hungarians gain the initiative and force Batu back.



04 Fall back!

To the misfortune of every man in Béla's camp, Colomon's triumph is temporary. Just when the ferocious hand-to-hand fighting threatens to engulf Batu himself, Shiban and Subutai materialise to the north and south respectively, the latter fresh from fording a deeper section of the river with the help of a hastily erected wooden pontoon. The Hungarians hacking their way towards Batu (killing 30 of his personal guards as they go) are forced to retreat.

05 The rabble emerges

Colomon and his surviving cavalry filter back into Béla's camp expecting to be met with a fully mobilised army. Unfathomably, Béla has neglected to ready his men for the coming onslaught. Eventually, a very public dressing down cajoles him into doing so, and the bulk of the Hungarian army (approximately 25,000 men) starts to file out. Despite not being in their correct formations the troops are ordered to make for the river.

06 The Mongols are pushed back

For the third time the Hungarians collide with the invading Mongols, and for the third time they batter them back towards the mud-caked banks of the Sajó River.

07 Subutai marches to the rescue

Despite their valiant efforts, faced with the prospect of encirclement, the Hungarians have no option but to give up the fight once more, but they do so having inflicted uncharacteristically heavy casualties on the Mongols. Hundreds of the fearsome invaders lie dead around the riverbanks.

08 The trap springs

Yet again Subutai has executed his plan perfectly, leaving his enemy no option but to falter straight into his brilliant trap. Pouring in behind the wagons, battle-weary Hungarians group together and face towards the approaching Mongols. Swords at the ready, they've nowhere left to run. It's fight or die. A few sallies are sent forth but each one is beaten back almost instantly as the Mongol troops close in.

09 Surrounded on all sides

Subutai has Béla right where he wants him. He coolly gives the signal and all hell is let loose as flaming arrows, stones and (according to some sources) Chinese gunshot engulf the camp.

10 A lethal escape

Those within the camp not immediately killed hurry to escape via a gap deliberately left open by the Mongols. Fleeing men are easier to kill, and the Mongols fall upon the stragglers without mercy, shooting them as they run or closing in and cutting them down. Béla's defeat is total.

Map: Nicholas Forder

The Siege OF BAGHDAD

THE ABBASID CALIPHATE'S CENTRE WAS TO DISCOVER THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF DEFYING THE MONGOL EMPIRE..

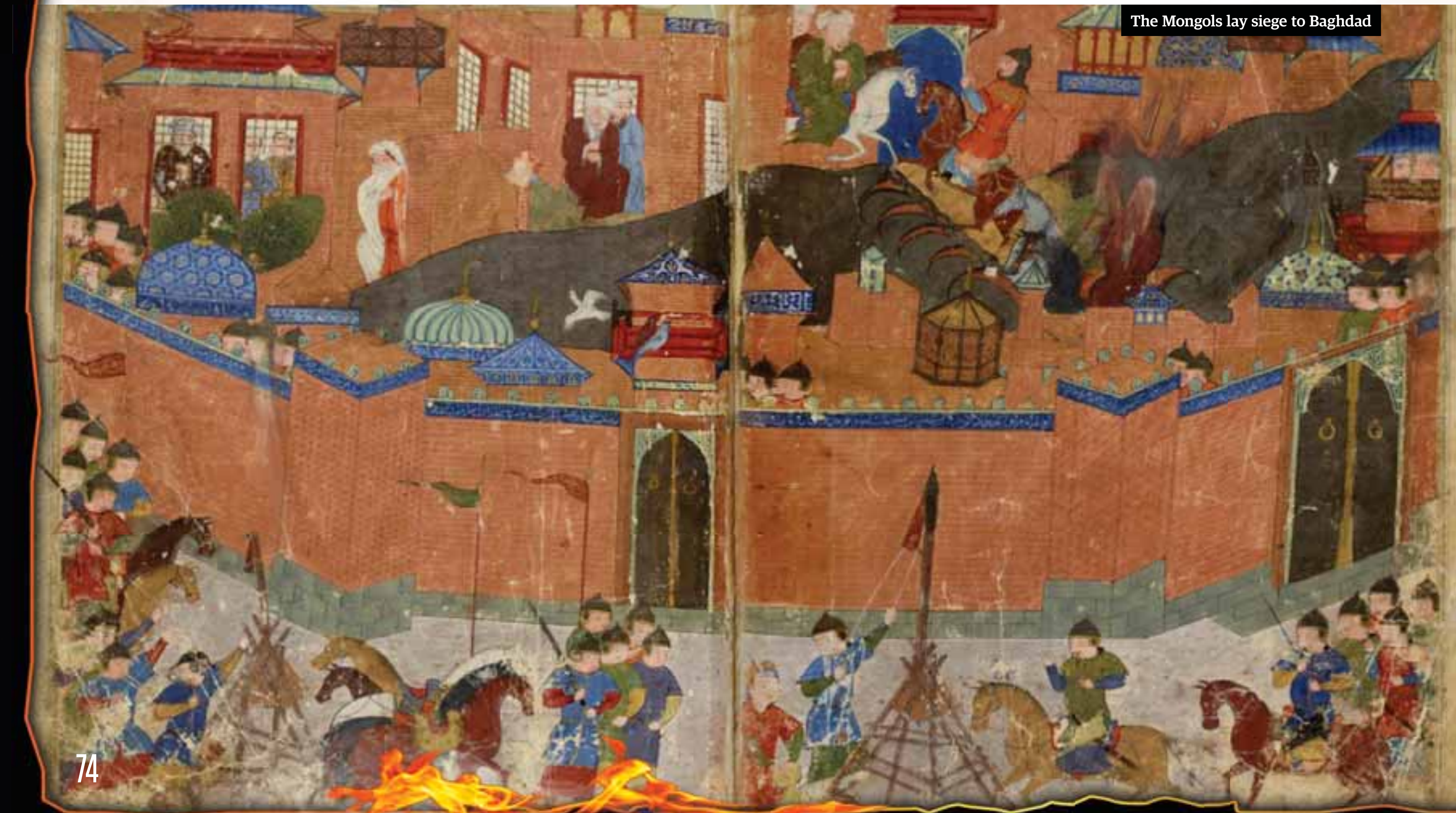
Written by Steve Wright

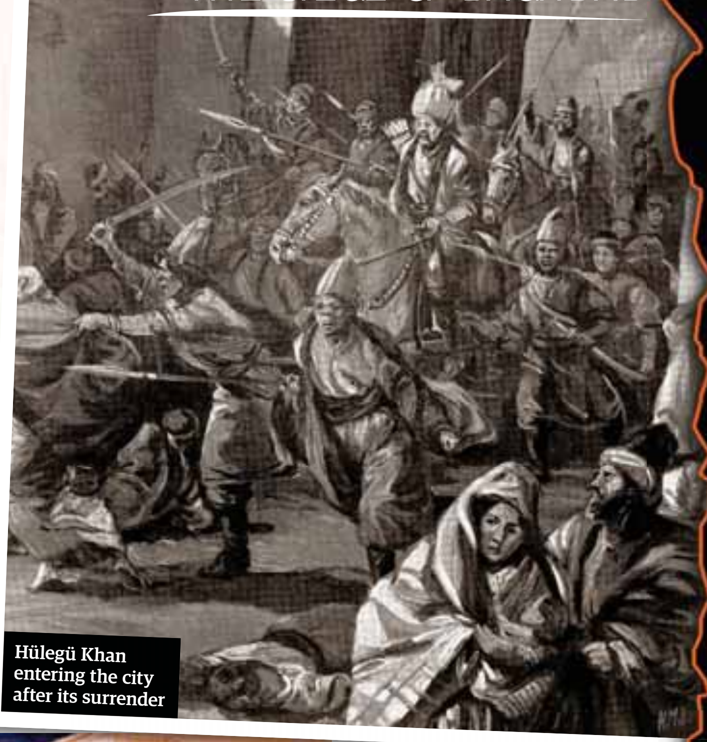
While the great and terrible Genghis Khan was long dead, the Mongols remained on the march. For a time at least his descendants carried on his work, and the Mongol name continued to inspire fear.

Hülegü Khan, grandson of Genghis and brother of the then-khagan (Great Khan), Möngke, was at the forefront of the Mongol incursion into the Middle East. Upon his coronation in 1251, his brother desired to extend his empire into Mesopotamia and charged Hülegü with making his wishes a reality. As the ruler of the nearby Ilkhanate, it was in Hülegü's interests to do so.

Even so, Baghdad wasn't an obvious choice for invasion. Previous Mongol excursions into the territory surrounding the city had been unsuccessful, and, moreover, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate took great pains not to court war. The city had long been trading partners with sections of the Mongol Empire, regularly sending tributes to the khagan's court.

However, these small displays of fealty weren't enough. In 1257, determined to establish authority over the Mesopotamia region, Möngke ordered Hülegü to conquer any states that refused to readily submit to Mongol rule. Having raised an army of 150,000 men (including Armenians, Georgians, Frankish and Chinese among their numbers), in the process conscripting one in every ten Mongol males of fighting age, they swiftly defeated the Lurs, Bukhara and Khwarezm-Shah of Persia, routing of the fabled Assassins in their


The Mongols lay siege to Baghdad


Hülegü Khan entering the city after its surrender

stronghold of Alamut. Hülegü had successfully carved open a path to Baghdad.

Al-Musta'sim, the Abbasid caliph, shouldn't have had to think too hard about Hülegü's demands to agree to Möngke's terms. Baghdad was a cultural centre rather than a military stronghold, and while it had previously withstood some minor skirmishes with Mongol forces, it couldn't hope to endure against a prolonged military assault by a full-strength horde.

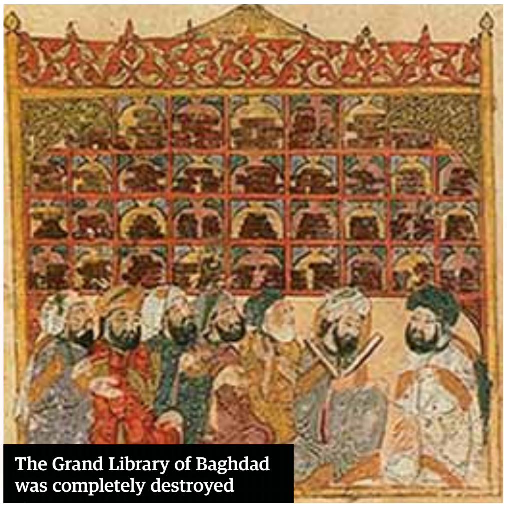
However, Al-Musta'sim defied all conventional wisdom by refusing Möngke's offer to leave Baghdad untouched if only he would submit. As to why he did this, historians can only speculate. As the head of the grand Abbasid Empire, perhaps Al-Musta'sim believed he had sufficient military resources to draw on to protect against invasion. Others theorise that he leaned heavily on the advice of his grand vizier, Ibn al-Alkami, who recommended against agreeing to Möngke's terms.

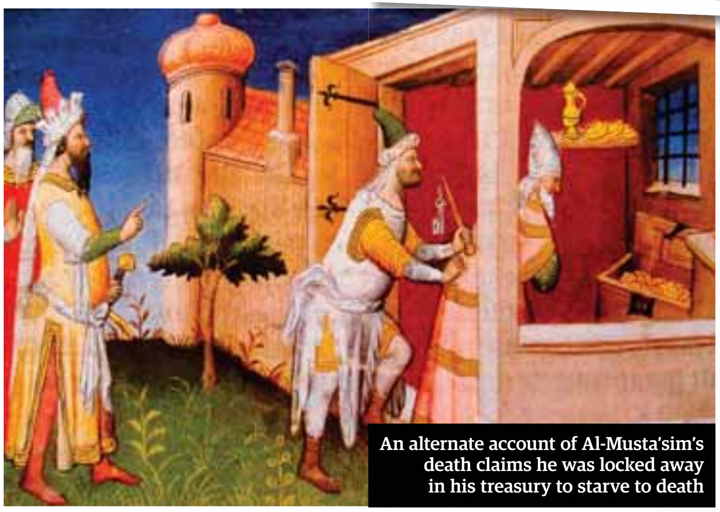
Whatever his reasons, Al-Musta'sim didn't do nearly enough to protect the city, failing to cooperate with local military commanders and neglecting to strengthen the city's walls. When Hülegü's forces arrived, trapping the city in a pincer movement by fortifying both banks of the Tigris River, Al-Musta'sim was finally forced into belated action, sending out 20,000 cavalrymen to deal with the invaders. Ultimately, this was too little, too late; the Mongols encircled and quickly defeated the disorganised Abbasid forces.

Victory on the field was followed on 29 January 1258 by the start of a siege. There was no possibility of the city surrendering; they'd had their chance, and the Mongols didn't repeat their previous offer. Nonetheless, Al-Musta'sim tried. The envoys he sent were summarily butchered, as were about 3,000 of Baghdad's noblemen who had left the city to offer peace terms to Hülegü. With their siege machines (likely the brainchild of their Chinese artillery experts), the city's defences quickly fell, and on 10 February Baghdad officially surrendered.

The Mongol forces didn't enter the city until three days later, but when they did they made their presence known, embarking on one of the bloodiest rampages in history. Of the city's million inhabitants, none were safe, save for its population of Nestorian Christians (due to Hülegü's mother's heritage). Men, women and children were executed, with the survivors being sent into slavery. Estimates place the number of dead anywhere between 200,000 and 800,000. Over the course of a week, Al-Musta'sim was forced to watch this butchery, which included the deaths of his entire family, save for one son (who was sent to live in Mongolia) and a daughter (who became a concubine in Hülegü's harem), before he was executed. Due to the Mongols' taboo against spilling royal blood, he was wrapped up inside a carpet before being trampled by horses.

The cultural impact of Baghdad's destruction was utterly catastrophic. Mosques, palaces and hospitals were completely destroyed, along with the city's 36 libraries and sites of historical significance like the House of Wisdom. The Tigris was said to have run black with ink. The folly of opposing the Mongol Empire had once again been bloodily proven.


The Grand Library of Baghdad was completely destroyed


An alternate account of Al-Musta'sim's death claims he was locked away in his treasury to starve to death

The reconstruction of Baghdad

DESPITE THE MONGOLS' EFFORTS, BAGHDAD WOULD LIVE AGAIN

At the time of its sacking, Baghdad was the cultural centre of Islam's Golden Age, making its destruction at the hands of the invading Mongol hordes all the more tragic. After the siege and slaughter the city lay in ruins.

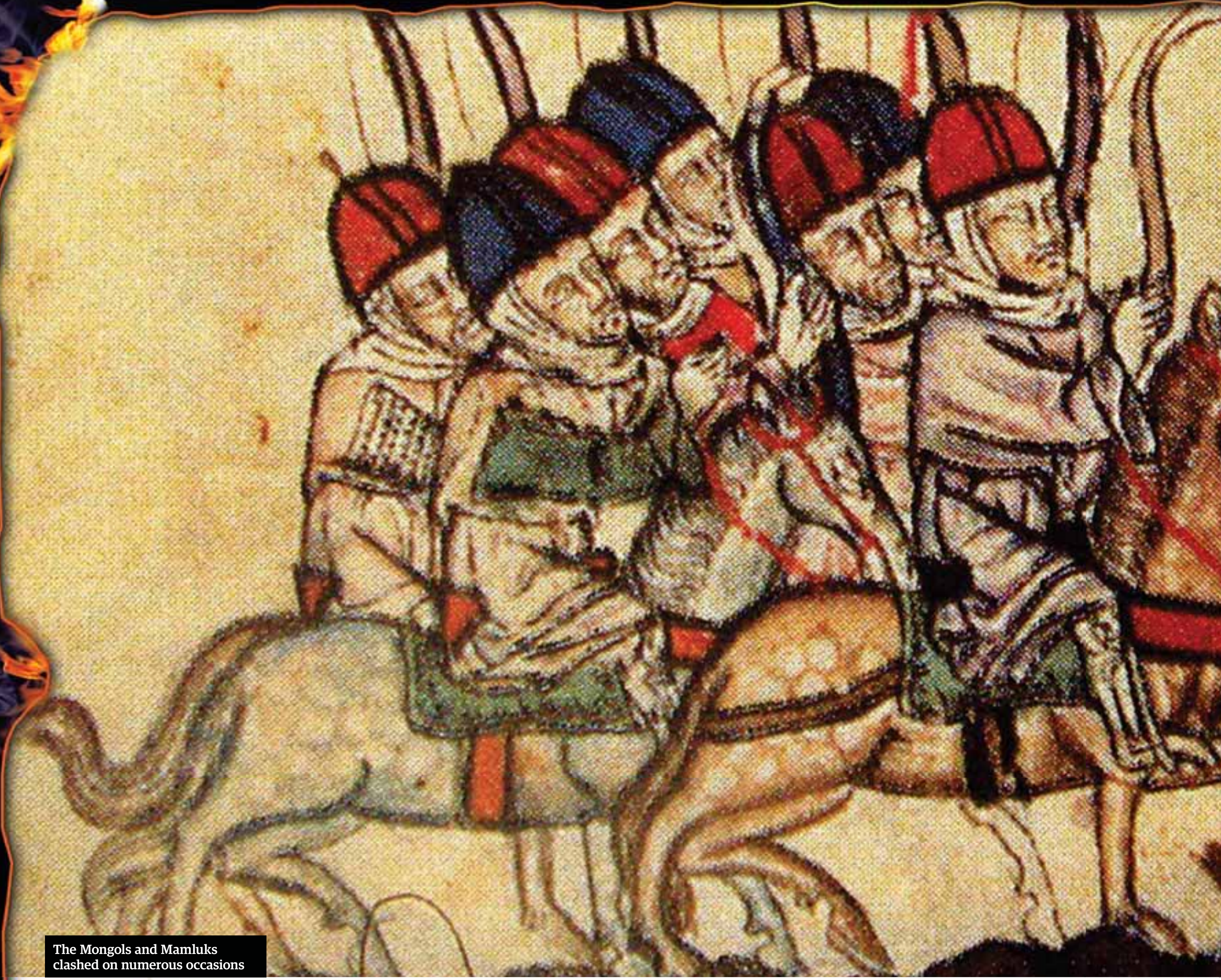
It would be a long time before life in Baghdad approached anything resembling normality. In addition to killing or displacing the majority of the city's population, during the siege the Mongol forces destroyed the network of canals that irrigated the land surrounding the city, with famine and disease following in their wake.

However, the city was gradually rebuilt. Hülegü left behind 3,000 soldiers to aid in the reconstruction of Baghdad, with Mongol historian and official Atâ-Malik Juvayni appointed its governor. Even so, it took a long time for them to achieve anything significant: a decade later a large portion of the area was still a ruin.

In time, though, Baghdad recovered. Eventually, the city became an economic centre, with international trade flourishing once more, coins being minted and religious affairs continuing to take place, with the royal palace being handed over to the Nestorian Christians. Baghdad's irrigation system was also rebuilt, and later the chief Mongol darughachi (governor) of the region was stationed in the city.

The Mosque al Khaffafin was one site that survived the destruction of Baghdad

Images: Alamy; Moshtakmoshtak CC BY-SA 3.0 (Mosque al Khaffafin)



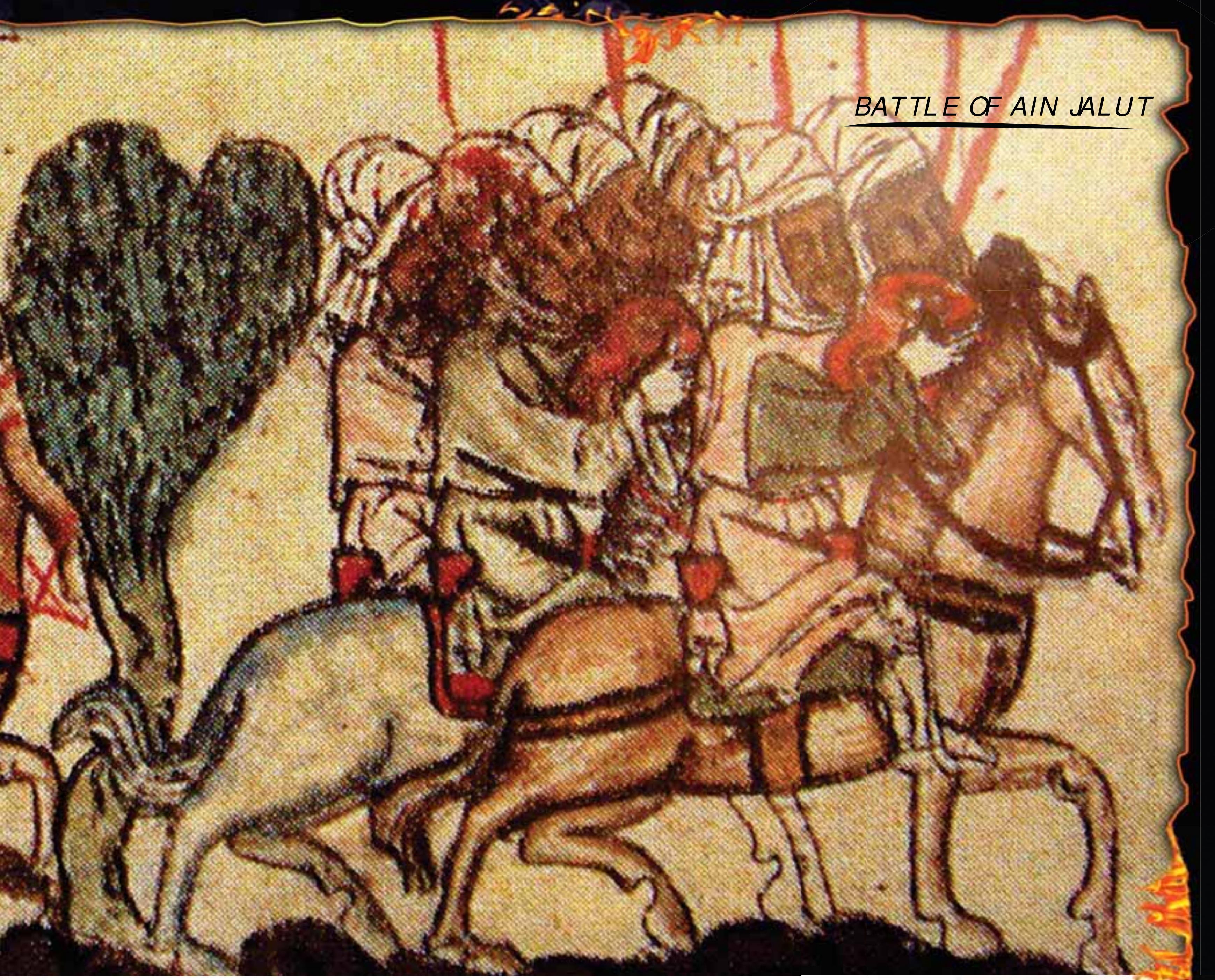
The Mongols and Mamluks clashed on numerous occasions

Battle of AIN JALUT

IN THE AUTUMN OF 1260 THE MONGOLS APPEARED UNSTOPPABLE, YET THE MAMLUKS BRAVELY CHOSE TO STAND AGAINST THEM

WHEN? 3 September 1260 | *WHERE?* Ain Jalut, Nazareth

Written by Steve Wright



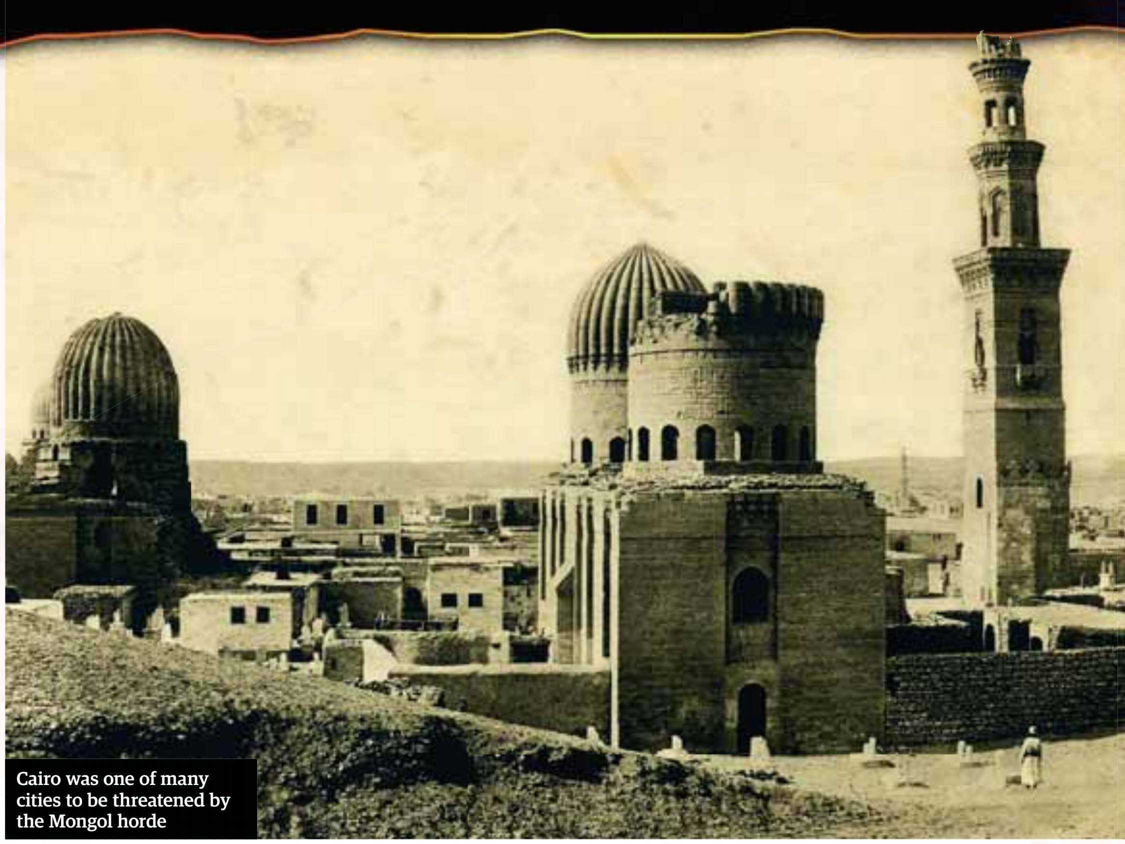
By September of 1260 the Mongols were on the march into the Middle East and looking increasingly unstoppable, with an assortment of empires and civilisations falling in their wake. Under the overall rule of Möngke Khan, the armies of Hülegü (Möngke's brother) destroyed the Assassins of Persia during the invasion of Khwarezmia before annihilating the Abbasid caliphate during their siege and subsequent destruction of Baghdad in 1258. They also put a bloody end to the Ayyubid dynasty in Damascus in 1259, before similarly conquering Aleppo. The message was loud and clear to every city in the Mongol's path: resist and there will be no mercy.

But not everyone got the message – or if they did, they paid little heed to it. The Mongols' next target was Cairo, the seat of power of the Mamluk sultanate. The Mamluks began life as slave soldiers imported from across the continent, who had over time thrown off their shackles and established their own dynasty. Trained as elite soldiers and bodyguards from a young age, the Mamluks took advantage of the political and societal upheaval in the region to seize power, taking control of an empire stretching from Egypt into the Middle East. They had done their time as subjects, and the thought of returning to slavery under the yolk of the Mongols was understandably something they wished to avoid.

This would have applied doubly so to the Mamluk leader, Qutuz. Of Turkish origin and having grown up in Central Asia, his homeland had suffered the fate shared by many others when it was invaded by the Mongols in the 1230s, with Qutuz being sold as a slave and initially taken to Damascus before being sold on to Aybak, the sultan of Cairo, where his reinvention as a Mamluk took place. When Aybak was assassinated in 1257, Qutuz became vice-sultan to Al-Mansur Ali, Aybak's son. Following the sacking of Baghdad, the emirs of Cairo realised they needed a stronger sultan to take control of the situation, alighting on Qutuz as their saviour. To this end he deposed Ali and took control, telling the amirs that they could appoint a new sultan in his place once the crisis was over. He had experienced first-hand what the Mongols did to their enemies and knew what savagery they were capable of.

Modern-day Baghdad. The Iraqi capital was a cultural hub before the Mongols arrived

Images: Alamy (main)

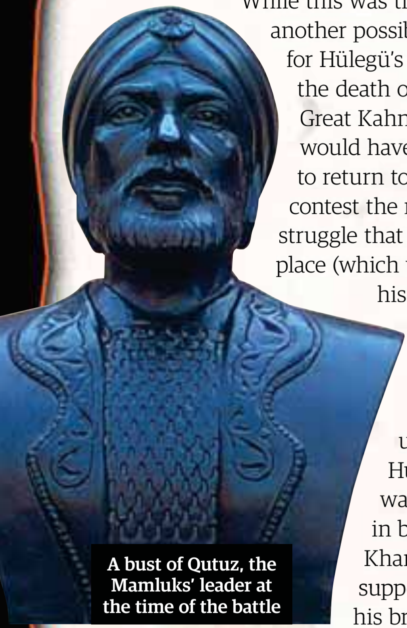

Cairo was one of many cities to be threatened by the Mongol horde

Having once been a prisoner of the Mongols, it is easy to draw a line of correlation between Qutuz's experiences and his response when, in 1260, Hülegü Khan, the leader of the Ilkhanate region of the Mongol Empire (which covered territory in what is now Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan), sent envoys to Qutuz in Cairo demanding his surrender. "You should think of what happened to other countries and submit to us. You have heard how we have conquered a vast empire and have purified the earth of the disorders that have tainted it. We have conquered vast areas, massacring all the people. You cannot escape from the terror of our armies. Where will you flee? … Hasten your reply before the fire of war is kindled. Resist and you will suffer the most terrible catastrophes."

Qutuz's response was unequivocal: he had the envoys executed and their heads displayed on Cairo's city gates. What passed for the process of Mongol diplomacy was clearly at an end.

While undoubtedly a pointed act of defiance, it was also a risky one to say the least. The Mongols weren't known for their displays of mercy, and such a wanton act of insubordination wouldn't have endeared Qutuz to them. Moreover, Hülegü's army comprised around 100,000 troops. It was a daunting number, and, despite being famous warriors, the Mamluks were, the Hülegü's battle-hardened horde surrounded Cairo, it is highly unlikely that the city's inhabitants would have been able to resist them for long. Failure to do so would have resulted in the wholesale slaughter of everyone inside Cairo's walls.

However, a stroke of luck intervened in favour of the Mamluks. Realising that there were not enough resources locally to feed and support such a large force of soldiers and their horses, Hülegü withdrew from the area, leaving a relatively small force of 10,000 soldiers behind, with Kitbuqa Noyan, a Nestorian Christian, placed in command. While this was the reason he gave, another possible justification for Hülegü's withdrawal was the death of his brother, the Great Kahn Möngke. Hülegü would have been desperate to return to Mongolia to contest the resulting power struggle that was likely to take place (which would account for his decision to take his men further north, ready to respond if things turned especially ugly). While Hülegü himself wasn't interested in becoming Great Khan, he was eager to support the claim of his brother Kublai.


A bust of Qutuz, the Mamluks' leader at the time of the battle

> "Adding to the carnage was the Mamluks' deployment of 'hand cannoneers'"

Seeing the opportunity that fate had placed before him, Qutuz decided to come out and meet the relatively depleted Mongol army in open battle, rather than wait for them to march south and lay siege to Cairo. To this end, he – alongside Baibars, a fellow Mamluk who he had formed an alliance with – set out from Cairo with a force of 20,000 soldiers to confront the enemy.

To approach the Mongols, who were rapidly proceeding south, they had to cross through the Kingdom of Jerusalem, a land that posed an array of potential problems. A Christian nation, the kingdom was traditionally an enemy of the Muslim Mamluks. However, with the Mongols known to have made overtures to Jerusalem as well, it was pivotal to the Mamluks that some form of understanding was reached.

Ultimately, Jerusalem effectively sided with Qutuz and his Mamluks. While the two could never be described as natural allies (indeed, Jerusalem neglected to provide them with anything by way of military assistance), the former recognised the more immediate threat that the Mongols posed, well aware of what had happened at Baghdad, Damascus and Aleppo, not to mention the recent sacking of the city of Sidon. To this end, Pope Alexander IV forbade an alliance with the Mongols and allowed the Mamluks to pass through the kingdom before they made camp near Acre. It was while they were here that Qutuz received word that the Mongols had crossed the Jordan River, bringing them closer to the Mamluks' position. Mobilising his troops, Qutuz prepared to attack.

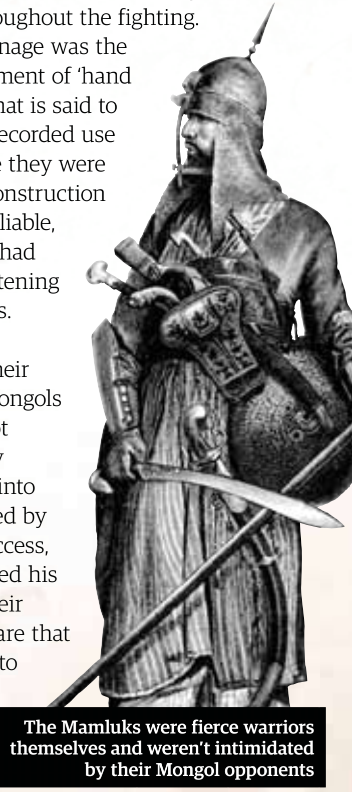
The site of the impending battle would be the spring at Ain Jalut (translating as 'Eye of Goliath', or 'Goliath's Well), located to the north of Jerusalem in the Jezreel Valley. The Mongols had raided smaller towns such as Baalbek, al-Subayba and Ajlun and were ready for battle. However, thanks to Baibars' intimate knowledge of the terrain, not to mention their superior numbers, the Mamluks enjoyed a significant advantage.

With the bulk of his force concealed in areas high above the valley, on 3 September 1260 the rest of Qutuz's forces met Kitbuqa and his Mongols in battle. It proved to be a bloody engagement.

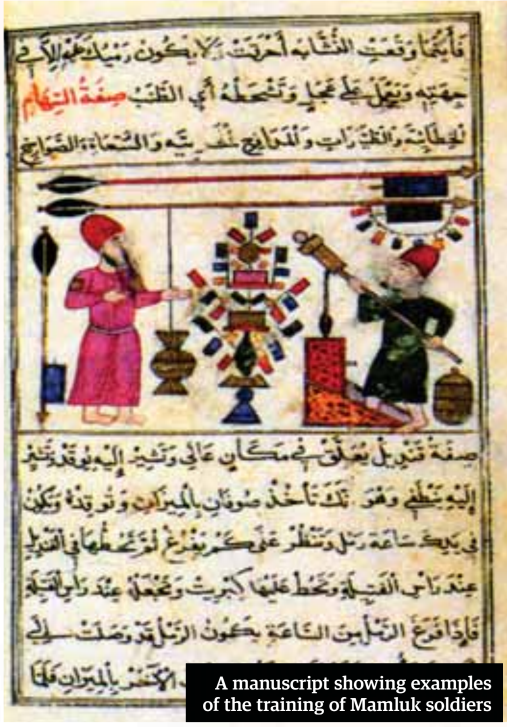
Both forces relied heavily on the use of cavalry, with hit-and-run tactics being implemented throughout the fighting. Adding to the carnage was the Mamluks' deployment of 'hand cannoneers' in what is said to be history's first recorded use of firearms. While they were rudimentary in construction and not always reliable, they nonetheless had the effect of frightening the Mongol horses.

Despite lacking the numbers of their opponents, the Mongols fought fiercely, not realising that they were being lured into a trap. Emboldened by their apparent success, Kitbuqa encouraged his troops to press their opponents, unaware that he was playing into their hands.

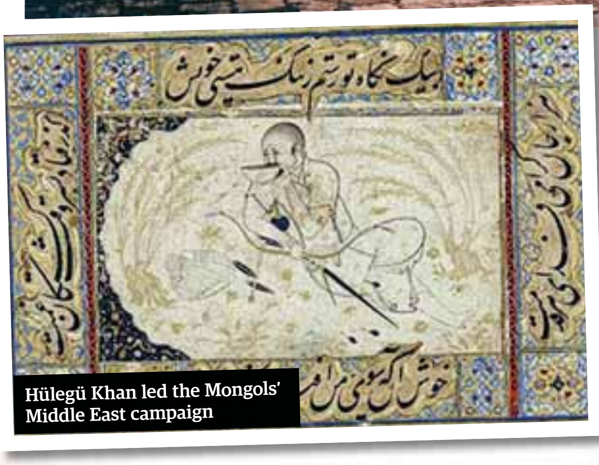
With the Mongols having been lured in,


The Mamluks were fierce warriors themselves and weren't intimidated by their Mongol opponents

Hand cannons were used for the first time at Ain Jalut

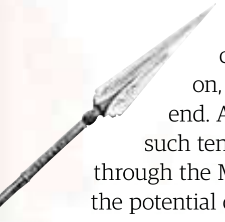


A manuscript showing examples of the training of Mamluk soldiers



Hülegü Khan led the Mongols' Middle East campaign

the Mamluk soldiers who had been hiding in the surrounding highland areas chose this moment to spring their attack, firing scores of arrows at the Mongols and encircling them, pinning them down on three sides and effectively leaving them with nowhere to go. Ironically, this was a tactic that the Mongols themselves were famous for: feigning retreat, then returning with a vengeance to encircle and overwhelm their opponents.



However, the Mongols weren't beaten yet. Seeing that they were cornered, Kitbuqa roared his men on, encouraging them to fight to the end. And fight on they did, doing so with such tenacity that they almost smashed through the Mamluk army's left flank. Realising the potential consequences if the Mongols were able to get through, Qutuz personally led a group of reinforcements in order to rally his men and restore morale, apparently removing his helmet so that his men could recognise him.

While some Mongols managed to break through and organise a counterattack, having retreated back to near the city of Bisan, it was ultimately too little, too late. At this point, the Mamluks' numerical and strategic advantages started to come to bear. While some of the Mongol forces fled, the majority stayed to fight and were duly wiped out. Among their number was Kitbuqa, who stayed to fight to the death among the majority of his men. One account has him put to death after he was captured, defiantly taunting Qutuz for his loyal service to his Khan, contrasted with what he perceived as the Mamluks' inherent faithlessness.

Despite incurring heavy losses (believed to be around 1,500), the Mamluks had nonetheless won a decisive victory, forcing back the Mongols and halting their advance, and in doing so inflicting on them their first major defeat in open battle. At the time the Mongols possessed the largest empire the world had ever seen, and the Mamluks had successfully stood against it. The Islamic world was a hub of culture and learning, and while the Mongols' had already destroyed large swathes of it, the Mamluks' victory ensured that this desecration would not continue.

Moreover, their triumph created something of a power vacuum in the Middle East. With the Mongols on the retreat, the Mamluks assumed control of Damascus and Aleppo, and their power in Cairo was further solidified. However, Qutuz wasn't able to bask in his achievements for too long; on the way back to Cairo he was murdered, with many historians ascribing the responsibility for this act to none other than Baibars, either as revenge for a previous transgression or for not granting him leadership of Aleppo, as had allegedly been promised. Even if the group of conspirators weren't organised by him, he was the one who stood to benefit from Qutuz's demise.

The Mamluks' sphere of influence continued to expand, with Syria and the Levant in time becoming part of the empire. Ironically, they also turned their attentions on the region that had previously given them safe passage, with Christian cities like Antioch, Jaffa, Ascalon and Acre being invaded in later years.

Despite Hülegü's fury at the defeat and vow to revenge himself upon Cairo in the form of a successful conquest, ultimately his proclamations were never realised. Subsequent smaller-scale assaults were made upon Cairo in 1281, 1299, 1300, 1303 and 1312, but none of the attacks met with much success. Eventually, the Mongols' emnity with the Mamluks ended in 1323 when the Ilkhanite Mongols sued for peace, a prospect that would have been unthinkable half a century earlier as Baghdad burned.

Most significantly of all, the defeat at Ain Jalut marked the point at which the Mongol Empire gradually began to slide into infighting. With Möngke having died in 1259, and with Hülegü himself passing away in 1265 (after warring with his brother Berke, who had converted to Islam and formed an alliance with the Mamluks), the Mongol Empire was to expand no further. Incredibly, the Ilkanites themselves would eventually convert to Islam, having at one point numbered among the religion's most vicious opponents. Having once threatened to snake through the Middle East and into North Africa and potentially even further into Europe, the defeat at Ain Jalut effectively marked the beginning of the end for the Mongols' dreams of untrammelled expansion.

The site of Ain Jalut today

Images: SoultanOmar CC BY-SA 3.0 (Qutuz); Alamy (Mamluks, Cairo, hand cannons, manuscript)

Mongol Empire

Infantry and Cavalry

10,000-12,000

Leader

Kitbuqa Noyan

A Nestorian Christian and trusted lieutenant of Hülegü Khan, he was placed in charge of the Mongol army after Hülegü withdrew with the majority of his forces.

Strengths Brave and fanatical, he commanded some of history's most fearsome warriors.

Weaknesses His force was depleted, fighting in unknown territory and outnumbered.

Main unit

Cavalry

The Mongols favoured combat on horseback, frequently encompassing hit-and-run tactics as part of their overall military strategy. A Mongol on horesback was a daunting sight for any opponent.

Strengths Effective at forcing gaps in enemy lines.

Weaknesses If trapped in confined spaces could become unwieldy.

Main weapon

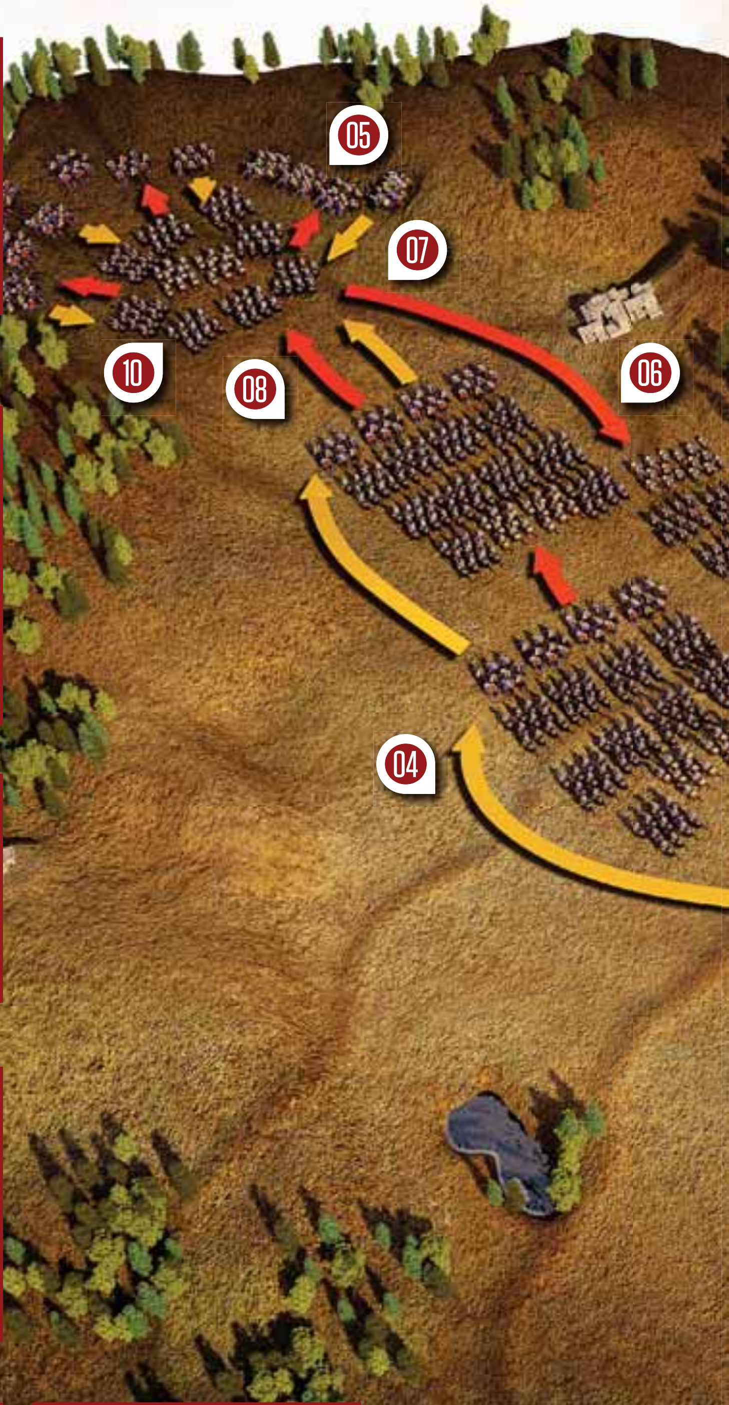
Bow and arrow

Wielded both by infantry and cavalry, this was used both in close-quarters and long-distance combat, and along with the lance and knife became a hallmark of Mongol infantry.

Strengths Versatile and easy to carry.

Weaknesses Limited by supply of ammunition.

BATTLE OF



1 Mongols cross the Jordan river

While the Mamluks rest in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Mongol forces, led by Kitbuqa Noyan, move through Baalbek (now Lebanon), cross the Jordan River to Beth-shean and continue south. Although depleted by Hülegü's withdrawal, their force of 10,000 men still poses a serious threat.

2 Mamluks mobilise at Ain Jalut

In response, Qutuz and his lead general, Baibars, head north towards the oasis at Ain Jalut. Since Baibars knows the area well, they are at a tactical advantage. While they plan to meet the Mongols in open battle, a large quantity of reinforcements (notably archers) are hidden in the highlands overlooking the battle site, ready to intervene should the moment come to pass.

3 The two sides meet

Finally, the Mongols and the Mamluks meet in battle. With both sides relying heavily on their cavalry units, the fighting is pitched and brutal, as befitting both sides' reputations. Even so, at this moment in time there is no clear winner, with neither side letting up.

4 Mamluks feign tactical retreat

After a time, the Mamluks' spring their trap. Feigning a retreat, they withdraw into the valley. Sensing blood, Kitbuqa and his forces attempt to press their advantage, pursuing the Mamluks as they apparently flee. This turns out to be a grave tactical error, and one they will not recover from.

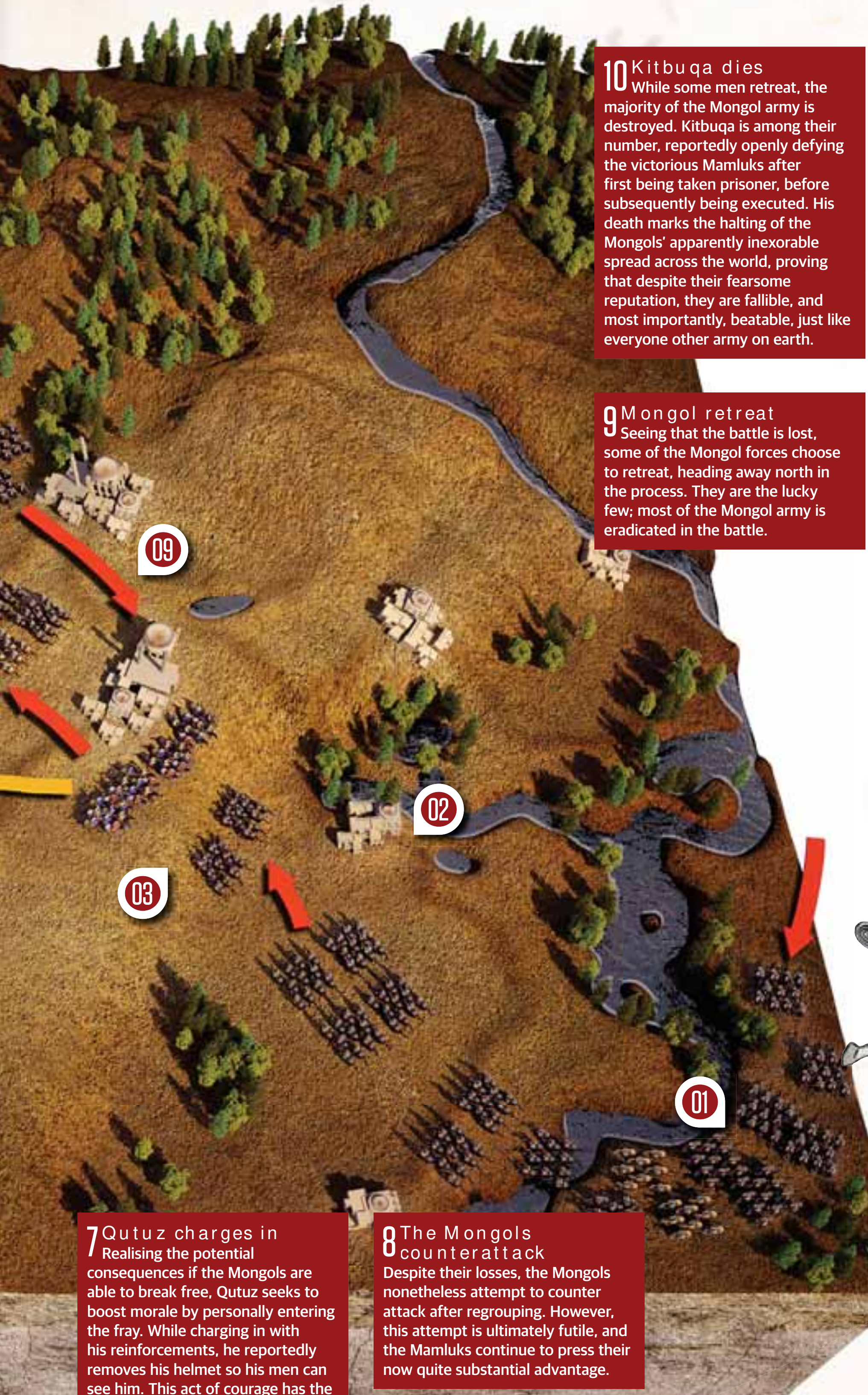
5 The trap is sprung

Once they have fallen back deep enough, the Mamluks enact their plan. The archers hidden above the valley unleash their arrows, causing a great number of casualties in the Mongol ranks. At the same time, reinforcements flood into the valley, surrounding the Mongols on all sides. A favourite Mongol tactic, it isn't often that their own methods have been used against them, and at first they struggle to find an answer.

6 Mongols nearly break out

Despite this nasty surprise, the Mongols are far from defeated. After all, they didn't earn their reputation on the battlefield for nothing. Spurred on by Kitbuqa, they somehow fight on with even more vigour, concentrating their attacks and in the process nearly breaking through Mamluks' left flank.

AIN JALUT



7 **Qutuz charges in**
Realising the potential consequences if the Mongols are able to break free, Qutuz seeks to boost morale by personally entering the fray. While charging in with his reinforcements, he reportedly removes his helmet so his men can see him. This act of courage has the desired effect, pushing the Mamluks forwards and forcing the Mongols onto the back foot.

8 **The Mongols counterattack**
Despite their losses, the Mongols nonetheless attempt to counter attack after regrouping. However, this attempt is ultimately futile, and the Mamluks continue to press their now quite substantial advantage.

9 **Mongol retreat**
Seeing that the battle is lost, some of the Mongol forces choose to retreat, heading away north in the process. They are the lucky few; most of the Mongol army is eradicated in the battle.

10 **Kitbuqa dies**
While some men retreat, the majority of the Mongol army is destroyed. Kitbuqa is among their number, reportedly openly defying the victorious Mamluks after first being taken prisoner, before subsequently being executed. His death marks the halting of the Mongols' apparently inexorable spread across the world, proving that despite their fearsome reputation, they are fallible, and most importantly, beatable, just like everyone other army on earth.

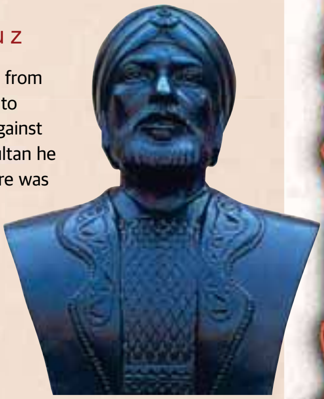
Mamluk Sultanate

Infantry and Cavalry

15,000-20,000

Leader

Saif ad-Din Qutuz



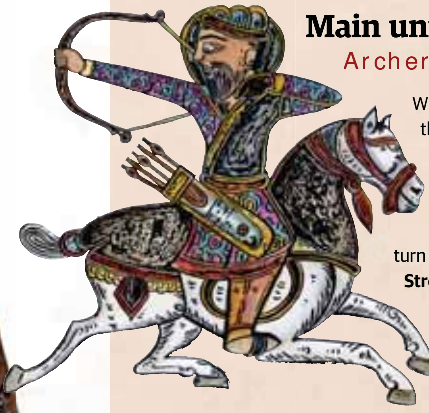
The Mamluk leader had gone from being a slave of the Mongols to leading an army into battle against them. Having replaced the sultan he was once subservient to, there was little the enemy could do to daunt him.

Strengths Tactically and diplomatically astute and in charge of a strong army.

Weaknesses Leading a force with mixed loyalties against hardened fighters.

Main unit

Archers



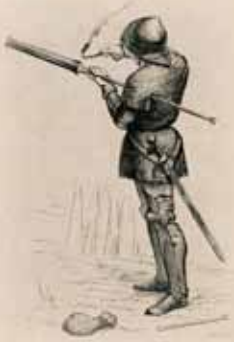
With the Mamluks using their knowledge of the high ground surrounding Ain Jalut to their advantage, these would prove to be crucial in the battle to turn the Mongol tide.

Strengths Capable of attacking enemies from long range.

Weaknesses Less effective up close.

Main weapon

Hand cannons



A recent introduction to warfare, they had the potential to change how wars would be fought, dealing death and destruction from range.

Strengths Provoked panic among the enemy horses and could inflict horrific injuries.

Weaknesses Untested and unreliable.

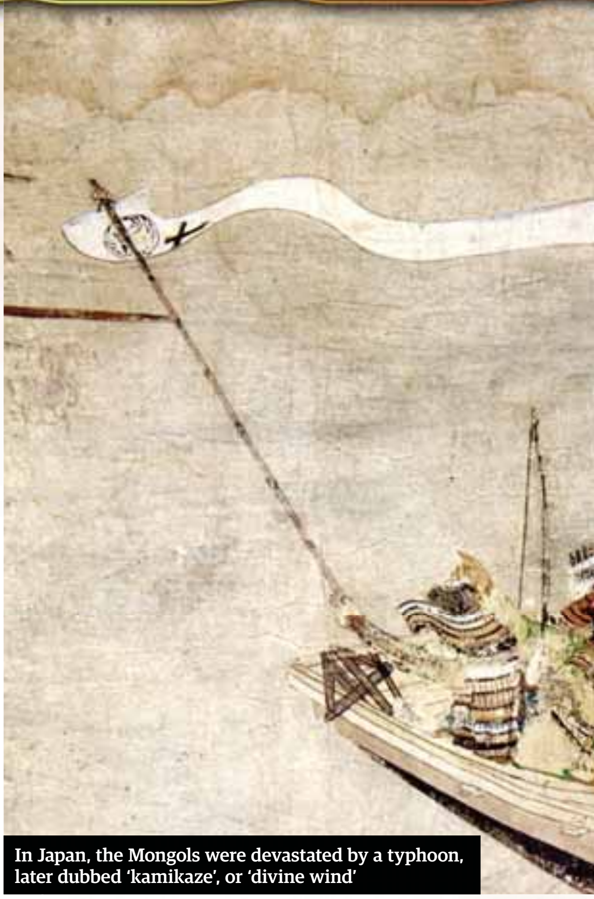
Images: Alamy (Mongol main unit, Mamluk main unit & main weapon); Stonnefrety7777 CC BY-SA 4.0 (Mongol main weapon photo); SoultanOmar CC BY-SA 3.0 (Qutuz); Nicholas Forder (battle map)

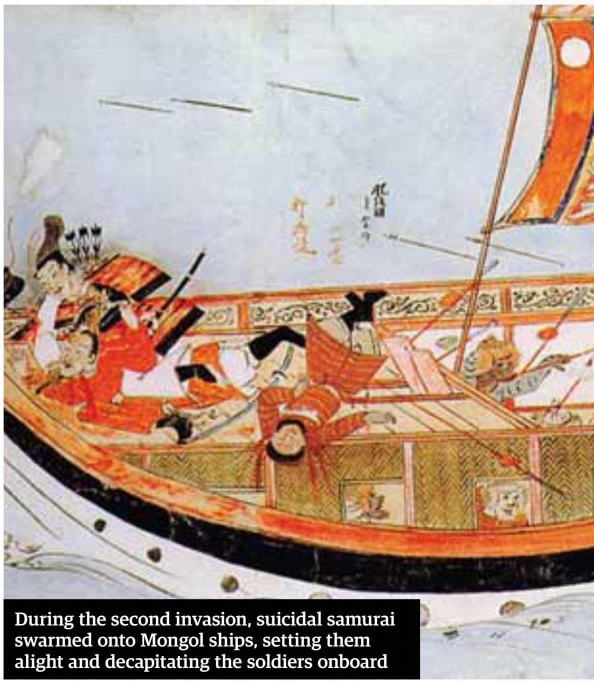
JAPAN

A Bridge Too Far

FUELLED BY SUICIDAL BRAVADO, INGENIOUS STRATEGY AND MIRACULOUS LUCK, JAPAN'S SAMURAI REFUSED TO BEND THE KNEE AND LIVED TO TELL THE TALE

Written by Hareth Al Bustani

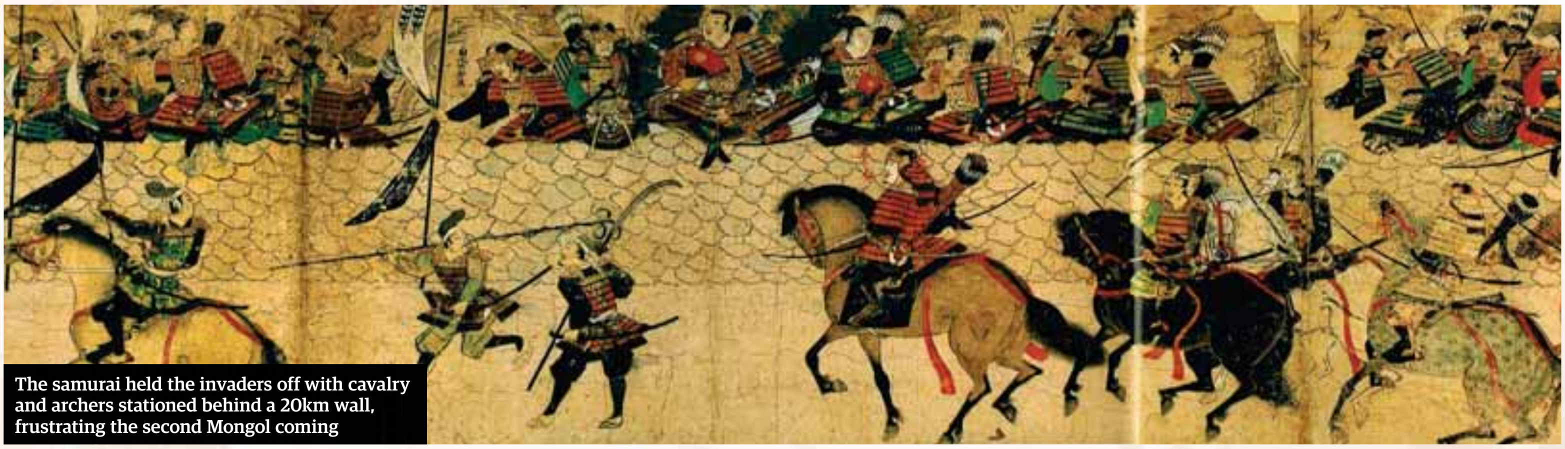

In Japan, the Mongols were devastated by a typhoon, later dubbed 'kamikaze', or 'divine wind'

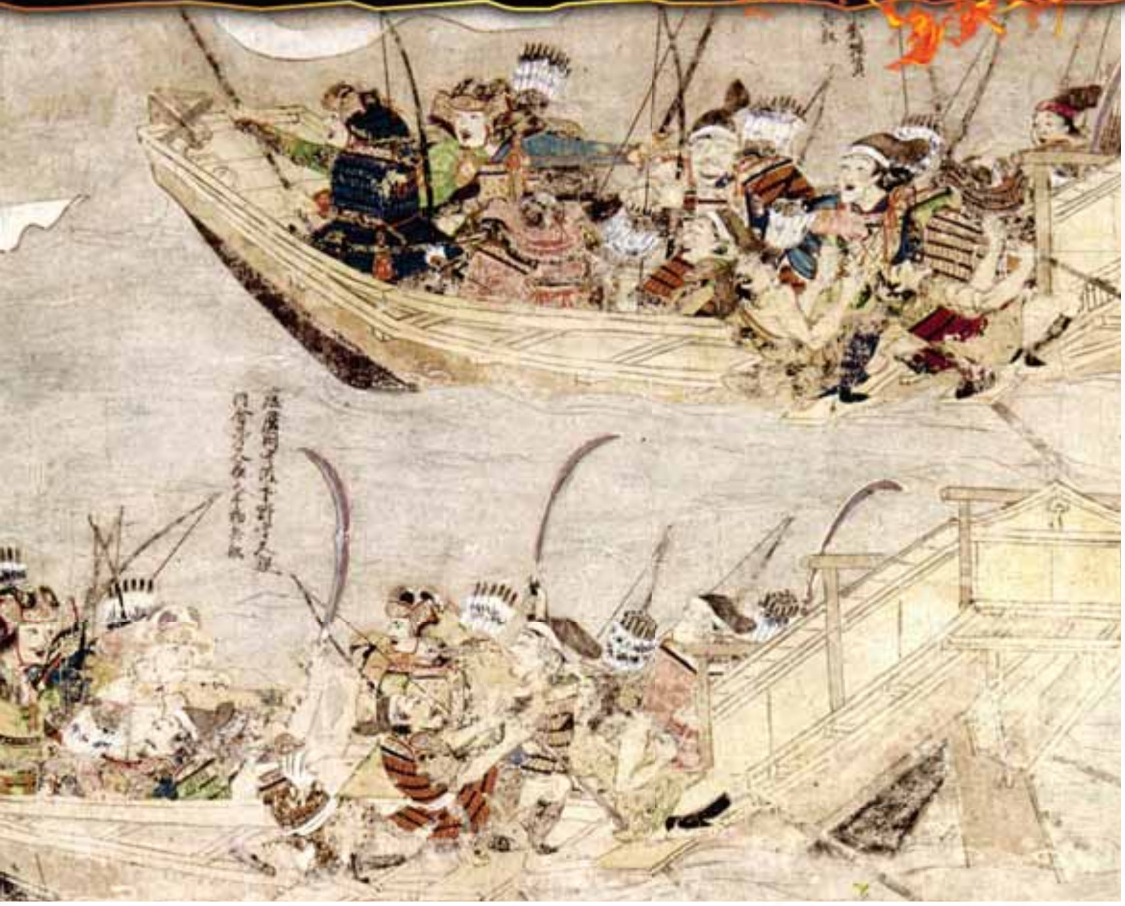

During the second invasion, suicidal samurai swarmed onto Mongol ships, setting them alight and decapitating the soldiers onboard

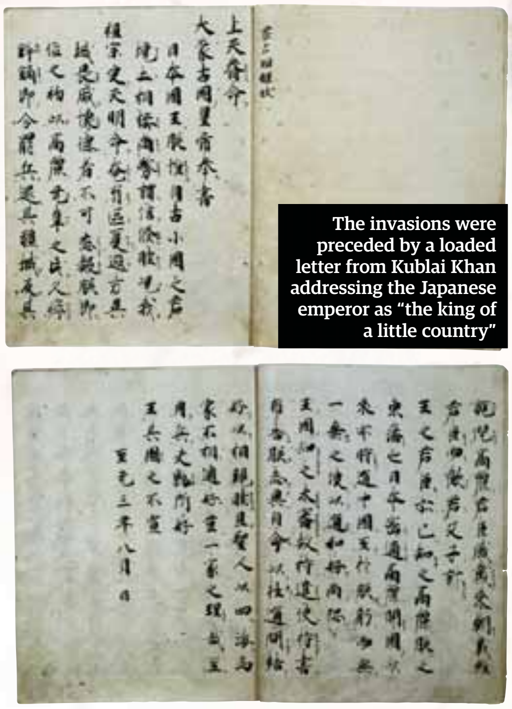
When Kublai Khan became Mongol emperor in 1259, having already conquered Korea and most of China, he set his gaze further east. Beyond the Tsushima Strait lay Japan, an archipelago ruled over by a military government known as the bakufu with the blessing of an emperor who had recently been reduced to a religious figurehead.

In 1268, a Mongol envoy arrived with a message from the Khan, addressing the Japanese emperor as "the king of a little country". Despite appealing for "friendly relations", it was tinged with the standard Mongol ultimatum: submit or face annihilation. Though the Mongols' merciless reputation preceded them, to Japan's ruling class, the elite knights known as the samurai, death was preferable to dishonour. When Kublai's envoy returned empty-handed, he ordered the Korean king to mobilise 10,000 men to build 1,000 ships for an invasion. However, it would take some time for the exhausted Koreans to comply, giving the bakufu enough time to bolster their coastal defences while the imperial court prayed for the safety of the realm.

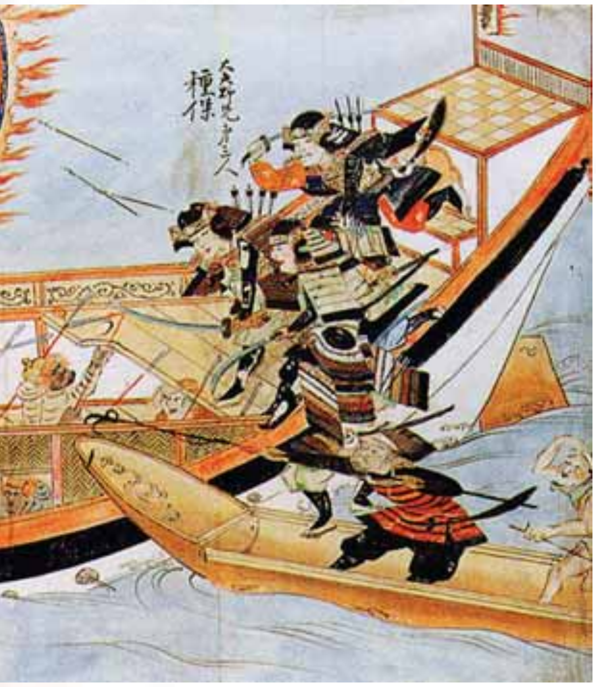
In November 1274, the Mongol armada set sail, manned by 23,000 Mongol, Chinese and Korean soldiers and 7,000 sailors. They landed at the outlying island of Tsushima, where, in typical samurai fashion, the local lord made a suicidal attempt to repel the attackers with just 80 mounted samurai. The Mongols burned down scores of buildings and butchered their inhabitants, punching holes into the hands of women and threading rope between. A similar


The samurai held the invaders off with cavalry and archers stationed behind a 20km wall, frustrating the second Mongol coming





The invasions were preceded by a loaded letter from Kublai Khan addressing the Japanese emperor as "the king of a little country"



fate befell the island of Iki, where residents were shocked to see their compatriots roped together along the bows of the Mongol ships and used as human shields.

The Mongols reached the Japanese mainland on 18 November, landing at Hakata Bay, where fighting broke out the next morning. It was hardly a fair fight; not only had the samurai not fought a large-scale engagement for half a century, but Japanese warfare had always been a highly formalised affair. Samurai battles began with warriors picking out worthy opponents to duel in single combat or archery bouts. When a samurai fired off a whistling arrow to alert the gods to the forthcoming battle, the Mongols burst out in laughter. They responded with a barrage of exploding bombs and poisoned arrows, accompanied by the rhythmic pummelling of drums and gongs.

Although they struggled against the Mongols' tight formation, 5,000 comparatively disorganised samurai held their ground until nightfall, hacking down around 13,500 invaders. As Japanese reinforcements drew nearer, a violent storm reared its head and the Koreans convinced the Mongols to retreat lest they be marooned. After just a day, the invasion was over.

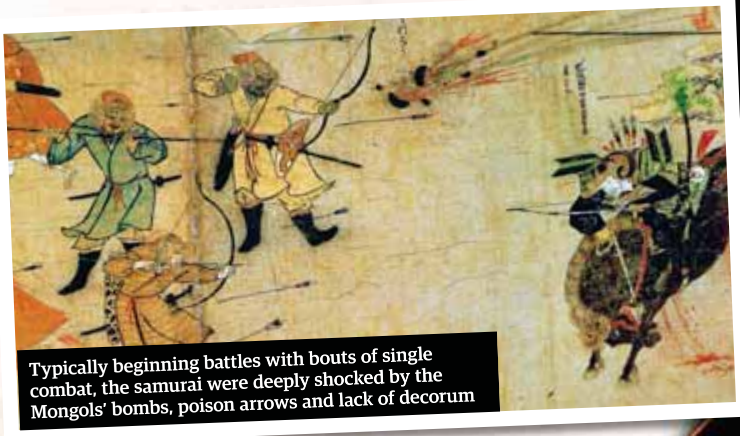
However, Kublai was far from finished. The next year, he sent another embassy, suggesting the Japanese 'king' pay homage in Beijing. Instead, the messengers were promptly beheaded. Expecting the worst, Japan went into a state of emergency, building a fleet of small warships and an epic stone wall, stretching 20 kilometres across Hakata Bay, reaching two metres high and set 50 metres from the shoreline.

When the Mongols returned in 1281, having finished subjugating the Song of southern China, they focused all their attention on the belligerent Japanese, sending 40,000 Mongol, Korean and north Chinese soldiers from Korea and 100,000 from southern China. Unwilling to wait for their Chinese counterparts, the Korean fleet raced to the Japanese mainland but were kept at arm's length by Japanese archers, who fired from behind the wall while their cavalry raced out to launch counterattacks.

Unable to break the Japanese line, the Mongols anchored at a pair of nearby islands, where they endured an endless stream of Japanese raids. Desperate for glory, samurai swarmed upon the Mongol warships with grappling irons, leaping into small boats, darting across sand bars and even swimming out to them. One daring warrior named Kusano Jirō, while dodging a hail of artillery, used his ship's mast to mount a lone Mongol vessel, setting fire to it and taking 21 heads.

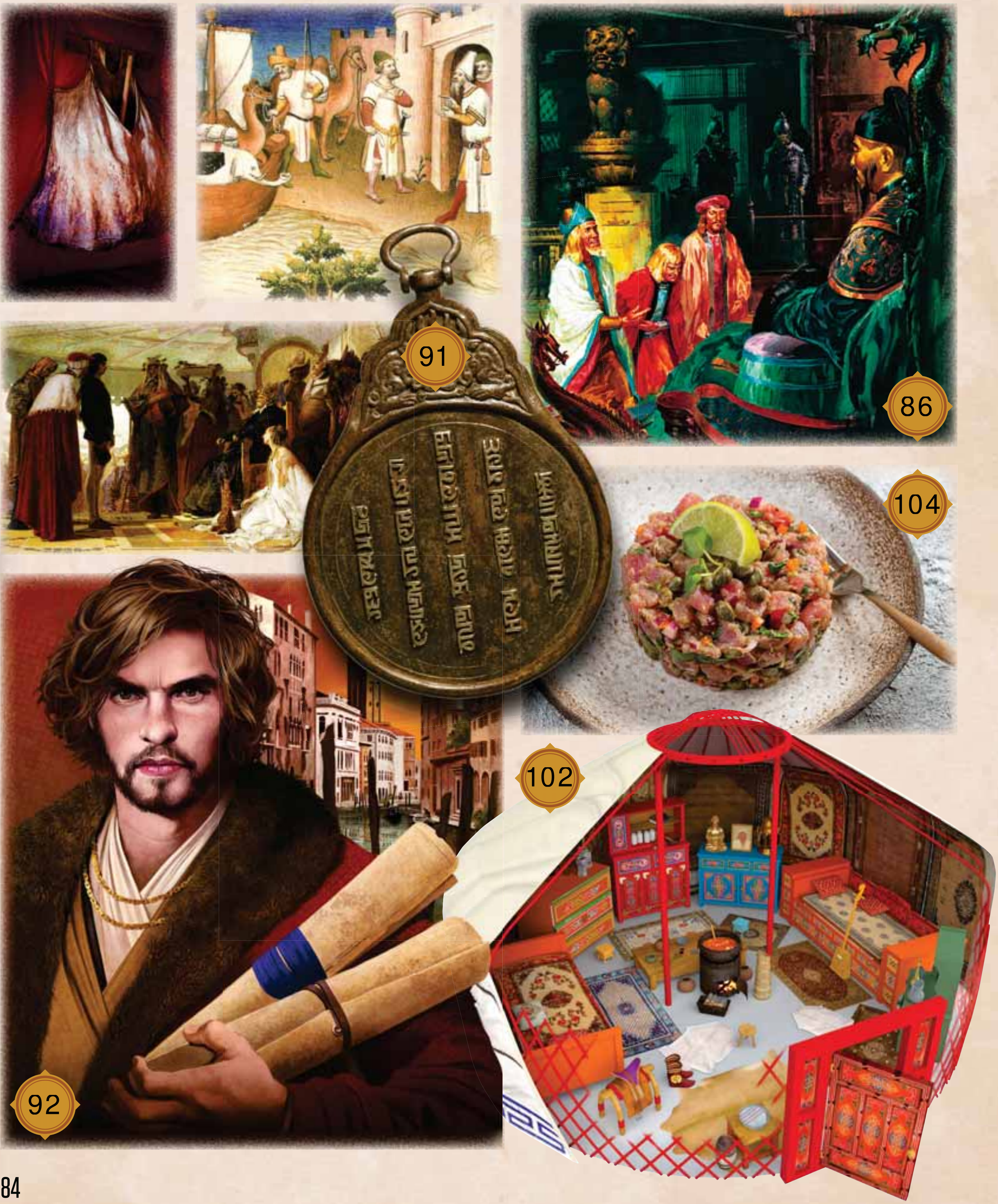
Eventually, the frustrated Mongols were forced back to Iki, where they regrouped with the 3,500-strong Chinese armada, binding their ships together with chains and plank bridges to deter further raids. However, at this crucial moment, Japan's prayers were answered in the form of an enormous typhoon. The Mongol ships were thrown onto the rocks, battering and dragging one another down into the depths, hurling tens of thousands of men overboard. The samurai hacked apart thousands of stragglers at their leisure, sparing only the hapless Song.

Although the Mongols never returned, the Japanese stayed on alert until Kublai's death in 1294. Seen as an act of divine intervention, the typhoon that dealt the Mongols one of their greatest defeats would be immortalised as 'kamikaze', or 'divine wind'.



Typically beginning battles with bouts of single combat, the samurai were deeply shocked by the Mongols' bombs, poison arrows and lack of decorum

Images: Alamy (typhoon, ships, beginning battles)



Images: Taylor Weidman CC BY-SA 3.0 (airag); Look & Learn (p86); Alamy (Marco Polo at Kublai's throne, Mongol warrior on horseback); Met Museum CC0 1.0 (p91); Getty Images (p104); Momotarou2012 CC BY-SA 3.0 (goat)

KUBLAI, CULTURE & COOKING

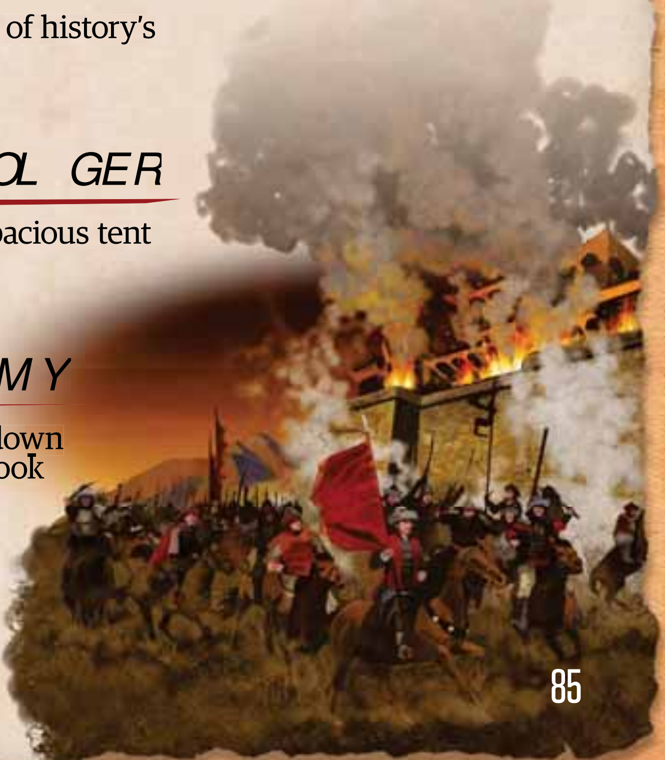
86 WRATH OF THE KHANS
How Kublai Khan fought to found a dynasty

91 A MONGOL ARTEFACT
What was a paiza and how did it work?

92 THE ADVENTURES OF MARCO POLO
Traverse the empire with one of history's most famous explorers

102 INSIDE A MONGOL GER
Bed down in a surprisingly spacious tent and live like a nomad

104 FEEDING AN ARMY
Swig down some airag, wolf down your soup and learn how to cook for a Mongol host



WRATH OF THE KHANS

THE MONGOLS SWEPT ACROSS ASIA AND EASTERN EUROPE AS RELENTLESS WARRIORS, BUT KUBLAI KHAN HAD BIGGER ASPIRATIONS, BUILDING THE GREATEST EMPIRE OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

Written by James Hoare

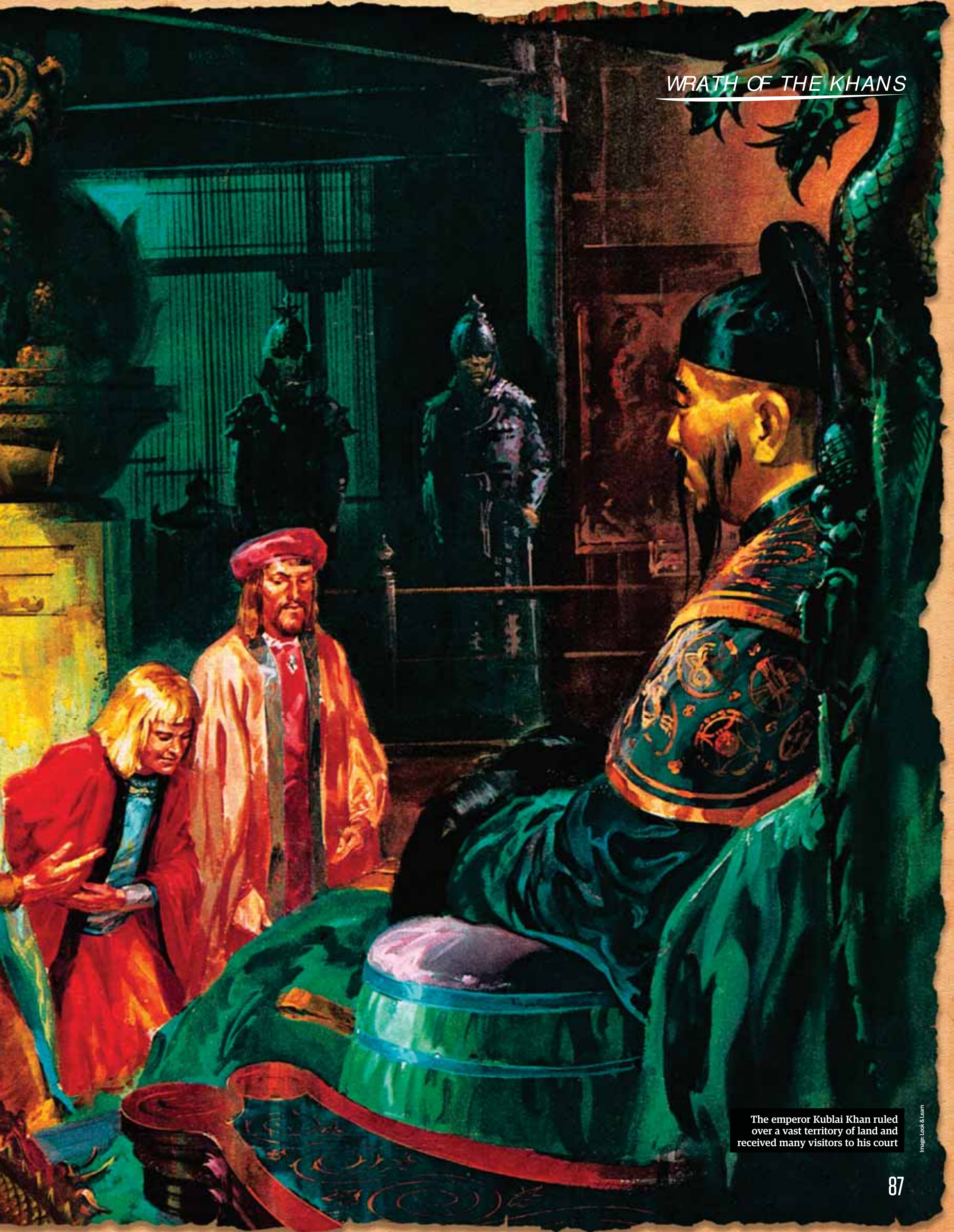
When Genghis Khan set out to rule the world in 1206, the world was but the sweeping plains and hills of the Mongolian Steppe and its people were the nomadic and tribal Mongols. When the world expanded to include more plains and more tribal peoples - the Uyghurs, the Naiman, the Tartars - they too were conquered and their warriors joined the Mongol horde. Like a snowball, the Mongol armies grew as they conquered and conquered as they grew. Eventually, though, their world became stranger and more complex.

By 1220, the Mongols had charged across the River Kalka to battle the Kievan Rus' in a land of Cyrillic script, feudal princedoms and the pungent incense of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. In the east, the Mongols had battled the mercenary armies of China's Western Xia and Jin dynasty - a world of courtly intrigue, vast wealth and tightly bound Confucian social order. In the south they rode out across dusty deserts of the Caucasus to challenge Shah Ala ad-Din Muhammad, swords clashing beneath the elegant minarets of Islam. Genghis Khan was a reformer, but his empire was an empire of growth - if he could be dismissed as a barbarian by his enemies, he became very, very good at being a barbarian. He transformed Mongolia's tribal scrappers into a ruthless and co-ordinated cavalry army that could adapt and learn from every foe it toppled, adopting Islamic medicine, Chinese bows and European siege engines to enhance their ability to wage war. Holding the reins of a vast multinational empire is very different from winning one.

Grandson of Genghis, Kublai Khan succeeded his older brother Möngke and knocked back the challenges of his young brother Ariq Böke to take the office of Great Khan in 1260. Kublai inherited an empire with problems that couldn't all be solved by simply digging his spurs into the flanks of his wiry charger and lopping a few heads.

Möngke Khan had died in China amid a sectarian set-to between fanatical Buddhists and Taoists that he had instructed Kublai to resolve, so the new Khan, perhaps more than any of his predecessors, understood just how fully the Mongol Empire's patchwork of faiths, languages and ethnicities could pull it apart. He surrounded himself with advisers of different faiths and set about building trust between the people of his empire and their 'barbarian' overlords.

Kublai Khan formalised the distribution of aid to sick, orphans and elderly scholars with dedicated officials, and a yearly census would survey the harvest and assess the damage caused by war, famine and flood, allocating grain from specially constructed granaries to relieve the burden. Religious freedom was increased and infrastructure was reformed. The Grand Canal



The emperor Kublai Khan ruled over a vast territory of land and received many visitors to his court

Image: Look & Learn

MONGOL HORSEMEN

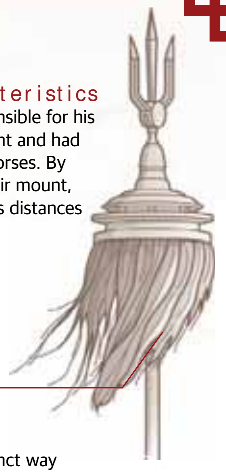
The army created by Genghis Khan was almost exclusively made up of cavalrymen divided into heavy and light cavalry. Its power lay in its mobility, the effectiveness of its specifically created tactics and that it was a highly qualified army for the type of war it fought. The rulers following Genghis – including his grandson Kublai – did not significantly change the structure of the Mongolian horsemen. Although Kublai Khan was involved in fewer battles than his predecessors, he did use the famous horsemen in his invasions of Japan, Burma and Vietnam.

Born to fight

In Mongol society, all men between the ages of 16 and 60 who were physically fit to fight were warriors. Some 60 per cent of the Mongol cavalry was light and 40 per cent heavy, although they complemented each other tactically, combining the shock power of the latter with the rain of arrows of the former. The riders were so skilled with the bow and arrow that they could load and fire while at a gallop with almost infallible precision.

General characteristics

Each warrior was responsible for his own food and equipment and had at least three reserve horses. By constantly changing their mount, they travelled enormous distances in a very short time.

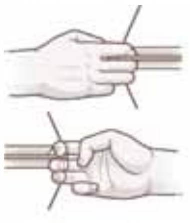


Insignia

The Black Standard, or Khar Sulde. Made from horsehair, it was only used for war.

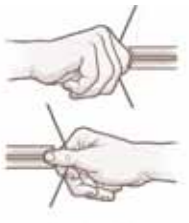
Shooting an arrow

Each bow, depending on its use and characteristics, has a distinct way of firing. The Mongols had their own technique for firing arrows...



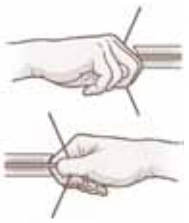
Mediterranean

The arrow is held with the index finger, without using the fingertip. The cord is pulled using the middle and ring fingers.



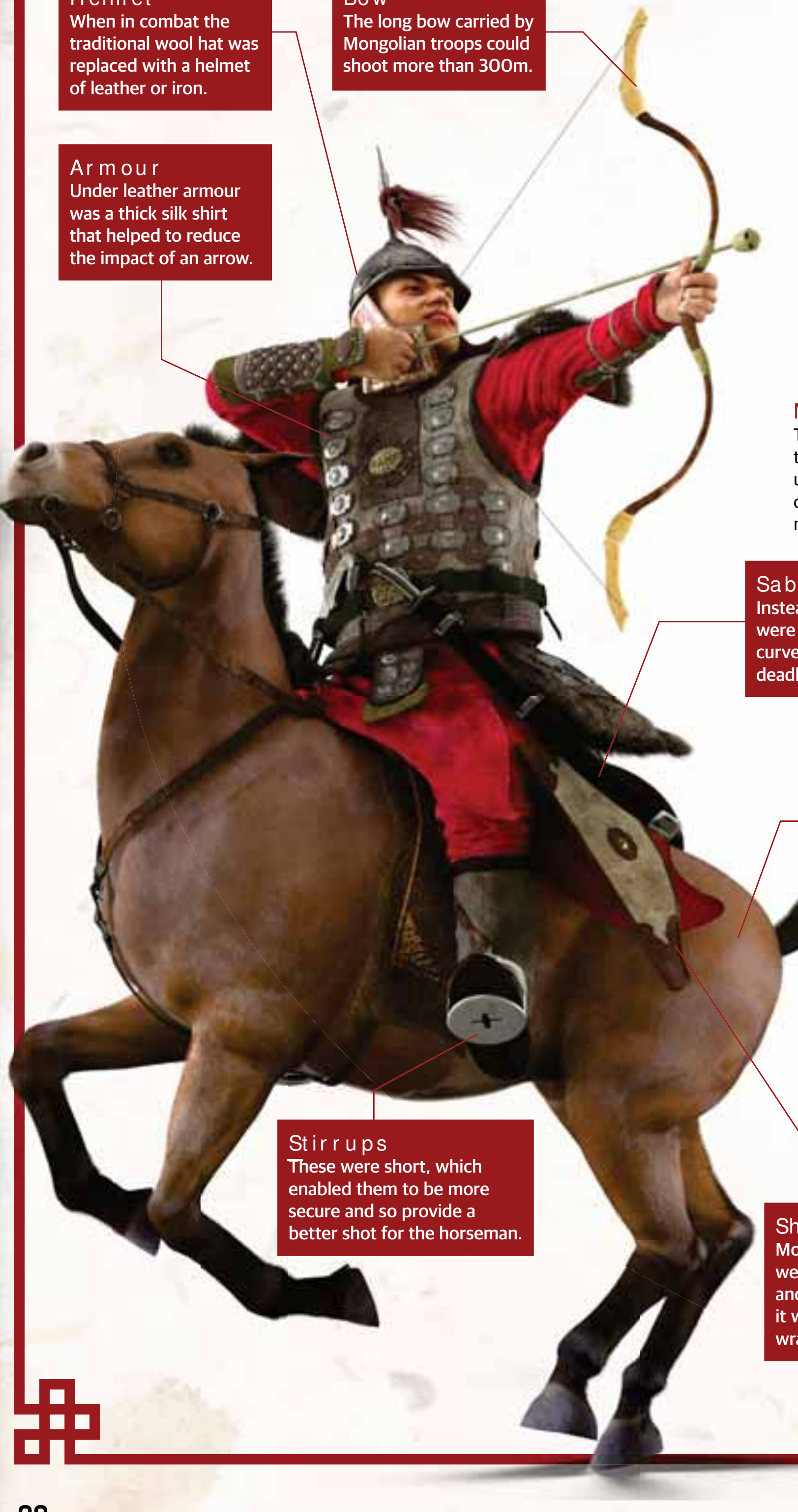
The pinch

The end of the arrow is gripped with the index finger and thumb. The cord is pulled using the middle and ring fingers.



Mongol

The thumb, the strongest digit, pulls the cord. The index and ring fingers strengthen the grip around the back and the thumb.



Helmet

When in combat the traditional wool hat was replaced with a helmet of leather or iron.

Bow

The long bow carried by Mongolian troops could shoot more than 300m.

Armour

Under leather armour was a thick silk shirt that helped to reduce the impact of an arrow.

Sabre

Instead of swords, sabres were carried. These were curved, short and light: a deadly cavalry weapon.

Horses

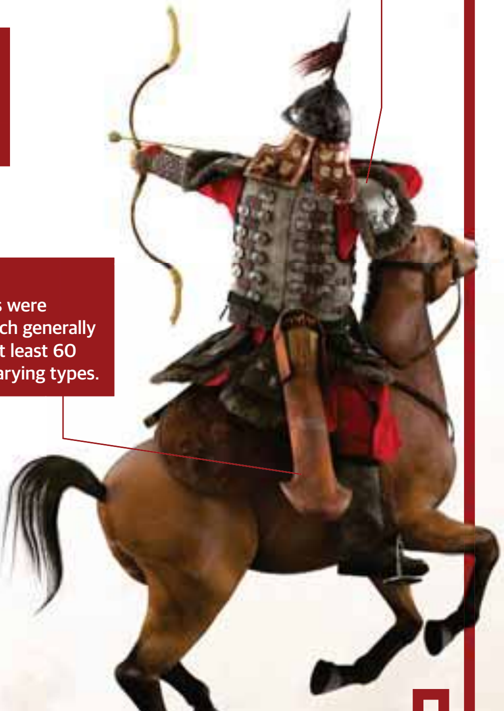
They usually belonged to the Przewalski's sub-group and were small, strong, fast and hardy.

Stirrups

These were short, which enabled them to be more secure and so provide a better shot for the horseman.

Shield

Mongolian warriors often went without a shield, and if they did carry one it was made of wicker and wrapped in leather.



Extra protection

Leather shoulder pads and wrist guards added an extra level of protection.

Quiver

Two quivers were carried, which generally contained at least 60 arrows of varying types.

was built, roads were improved, paper money was introduced and a new postal system was pioneered, with riders bolting between post stations and changing horses at each one to ensure that each end of this vast realm was in constant communication.

His empire was administered by a multinational cast of functionaries, whose origins he had divided into four categories of trustworthiness: first, the Mongols; second, other Central Asian people; third, Manchurians and Koreans; and then last, the Chinese. Meanwhile, ambassadors and travellers from further afield were welcomed for the knowledge and wealth they could bring - Christian missionaries even built churches.

While Genghis Khan's capital was Karakorum, deep in his Mongolian heartland, Kublai desired a capital worthy of an emperor in the domain where he had spent his youth. He installed his court in a newly built 'winter capital' - as traditionally nomadic people, the entire Mongol court would travel with the seasons, chasing the light to warmer climes - in what is now Beijing. Known as Dadu in Chinese (meaning 'grand capital'), in Mongolian it was called Khanbaliq - the City of the Khan, and its iconic Drum Tower still stands in the heart of modern China's bustling capital.

"The streets are so straight and wide that you can see right along them from end to end and from one gate to the other. And up and down the city there are beautiful places, and many great and fine hostelries, and fine houses in great numbers," wrote Kublai Khan's most famous foreign visitor, the Italian traveller and merchant Marco Polo.

At the centre of Khanbaliq was the Khan's palace, painted red and white, where, under the watchful eye of a thousand guards, he kept his four wives in opulent luxury. In summer, the court would decamp and return to Mongolia to the walled tent-city of Shangdu - known evocatively as Xanadu. Polo described two vast palaces, one made of marble and filled with "rooms of which are all gilt and painted with figures of men and beasts and birds, and with a variety of trees and flowers, all executed with such exquisite art that you regard them with delight and astonishment" and one of cane - better described as a 'pavilion' - which could be taken down and reassembled as befitting a nomad emperor.

If Shangdu was the embodiment of Kublai Khan's opulence - the Mongol equivalent of the mother of all static caravans - his court at Khanbaliq was the physical embodiment of his power and of the resentment that began to gnaw away at that power like dry rot. The first non-Chinese emperor to rule all of China, Kublai Khan was the monarch of a nation who had believed themselves to be the penultimate civilisation, whose word for 'foreigner' shared the same characters as its words for 'beast'. Now they were ruled by a new power that represented everything barbarous and uncouth they believed foreigners to be, no matter that these foreigners had crushed the ruling Song dynasty.

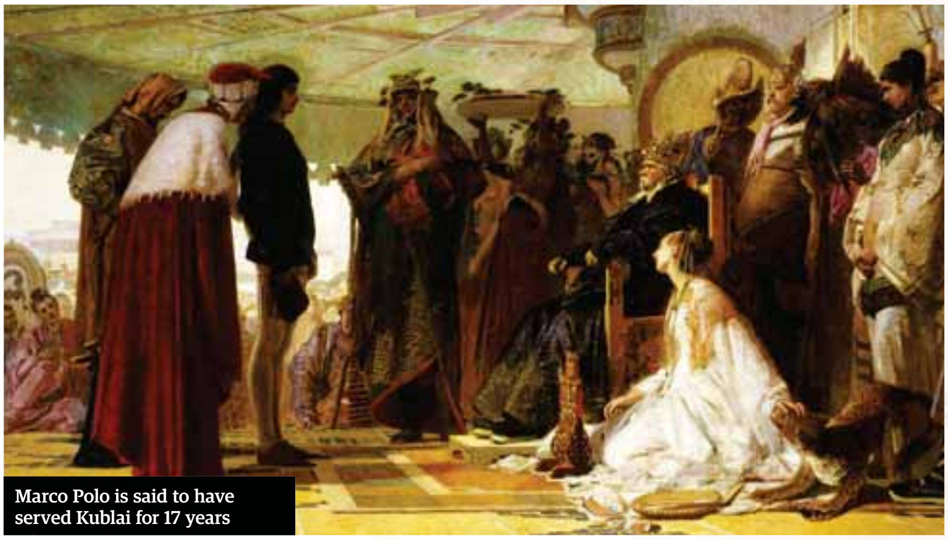
Marco Polo among the Mongols

Though Marco Polo was by no means the first European traveller to visit China or the court of Kublai Khan - and some modern historians dispute whether his adventures even took place and were instead cobbled together from the accounts of Arab and Persian traders on the Mongol Empire's southwestern fringe - his account was the most well known and most widely read for centuries.

Setting off from the powerful Italian city-state of Venice with his father and uncle in 1271, the Polo trio crossed the Black Sea and journeyed through Central Asia via the Silk Road with a Papal diplomatic mission for the court of Kublai Khan.

Though it's the 17-year-old Marco who dominates the narrative and looms large in popular imagination, for father Niccolò and uncle Maffeo Polo this was in fact a return journey to the emperor's court at Khanbaliq. Having first visited Kublai in 1260 and been gifted a golden tablet of free passage and a request to bring back 100 men to teach Christianity and European customs to the voracious early adaptors of his multinational court, they were the real pioneers and Marco Polo the wide-eyed passenger.

Nonetheless, the Great Khan seemed particularly taken with Marco - who even before the publication of his sensational proto-Lonely Planet guide in Old French, *Livres des merveilles du monde* (*Descriptions Of The World* in English), could tell a tale - and refused the Polo men permission to leave. Instead, Kublai Khan set them up as his roving emissaries, travelling the length and breadth of his domain and even further afield to southern India as the Khan's ambassadors, and reporting back, making their incredible 24-year adventure around the Far East as much a silk-coated prison sentence as it was a working holiday. If it happened at all, that is...



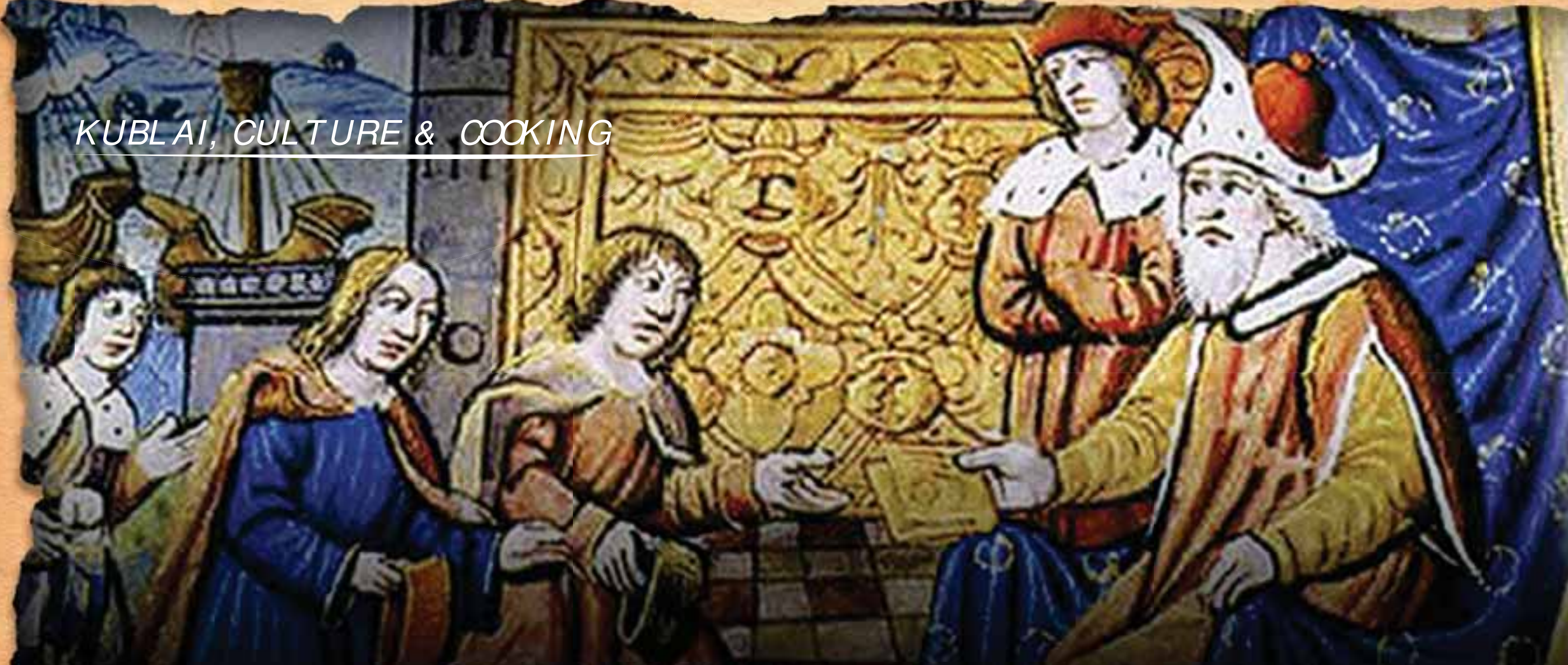
Marco Polo is said to have served Kublai for 17 years

"Kublai Khan set about building trust between the people of his empire and their 'barbarian' overlords"

Kublai Khan strived to reinvent himself as a suitable ruler of China. He restored the elaborate Confucian rituals that had been a hallmark of the Song court, baffling his Mongol generals and advisers with the sudden enthusiasm for song and dance in the halls of government. He built temples to his father Tolui, and his grandfather, Genghis, rehabilitating these former invaders from the steppe into the Chinese tradition of ancestor worship, and gave his second son, Jin Chin, a Chinese education, along with an introduction to both Buddhism and Confucianism. The complex Song bureaucracy, the six ministries of central government, the ruling Secretariat council and the infuriatingly labyrinthine multitiered administration of the provinces, was retained. His bloodline was wallpapered into the mythology of China as the Yuan dynasty, as divinely enshrined on the throne as the order it had replaced.

With one foot in the stirrups and another wrapped in the fine silks of Chinese courtly life, Kublai Khan may have successfully reinvented himself as the latest facet of the Chinese imperial tradition, but his image as a merciless warlord was in doubt. In the eyes of his detractors, Kublai Khan had ceased to be the heir to Genghis, whose hoofbeats struck terror into the hearts of kings and emperors, and instead he had become a posturing dandy. In order to appease his traditional supporters, Kublai Khan ignored his Chinese advisers and launched disastrous invasion attempts on Japan in 1274 and 1281, and on Java in 1293. Poorly planned and poorly executed, even his successful conquests - Vietnam in 1284 and 1287, and Burma in 1277 and 1283 - struck the Mongol Empire a body blow in the wallet and his revolutionary paper money had to be replaced in an attempt to stave off financial anarchy.

Images: Alamy (Marco Polo emissaries); Sol90 (illustrations)



The court's extravagance and decadence

"In Xanadu did Kublai Khan / A stately pleasure dome decree," wrote the great poet, critic and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge from an opium-addled fug in 1797. Few lines have intoxicated so many quite so readily with their lyricism and yet meant so little to most who quote them. Surrounded by gardens and a lake where the Mongol emperor would hunt with his pet leopard, Kublai Khan's "pleasure dome" was indeed a thing of beauty and luxury. Although the poem represents the benign, ignorant Orientalism of European writers of the period, Coleridge's own excess – drugs, drink and women – has an echo in the overindulgence of the Great Khan. Marco Polo was dumbfounded to be invited to a New Year's feast that began with a parade of 10,000 white horses (the colour of good luck in Chinese folklore) and 5,000 elephants, each animal clad in silk stitched with gold. Behind the silk curtains, once the candles went out, Kublai Khan supplemented his four wives with a vast harem, enormous even for the era and his position. He sent emissaries to the Tartars every two years to select between 400 and 500 new concubines who then rotated in and out of his bed-chambers six at a time in.

Following the death of his wife and unofficial adviser Chabi in 1281, Kublai Khan drank and feasted his grief away. He ate mainly meat – the traditional Mongol diet – boiled mutton, cooked lamb and vegetables wrapped in saffron. With it, he drank qige, fermented mare's milk – the Mongol tipple of choice – and koumiss, a beer made from millet. Alcoholism had been the sad fate of many of Kublai's predecessors, including his father, and he soon joined them, becoming obese and ill with gout, a medical condition caused by the build-up of crystals in the joints that causes crippling pain.

How Kublai restored the Silk Road

Once the vital trade artery, the Silk Road – a vast overland route that linked merchants in the east and west – had fallen into disuse, plagued by corruption. Kublai Khan set about destroying toll gates that opened the Silk Road to traffic once more, and increased the number of relay stations for messengers – a system known as the yam – where messengers could change horses and collect supplies as they barrelled from one end of the empire to the other. These yam stations were made available to associations of merchants, supported by low-interest loans from the state, who banded together into caravans to traverse the Silk Road, often commandeering Mongol warriors for protection. In China alone, by the end of Kublai Khan's reign, there were 1,400 relay stations with around 50,000 horses and 4,000 carts.

One of history's earliest passports, Kublai Khan's mission to speed up trade and communication along the Silk Road led to the issue of metal tablets called paizi (meaning 'pass'), which would be worn on the traveller's clothing or hung around their neck so they were visible to customs officers. Available in iron, silver and gold with the bearer's name (meticulous records were kept, with old ones cancelled on expiry), they entitled bearers to travel freely and requisition food, horses and guides, with a distinction made between officials on diplomatic business and important people – like Marco Polo, who was issued a gold one – on special errands from the Great Khan.

One surviving iron paizi, held at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art is inscribed, "By the strength of Eternal Heaven, an edict of the Emperor, He who has no respect shall be guilty."

> "His innovations in infrastructure and statecraft honoured the legacy of Genghis like no other Khan could"

While the Mongols within Kublai Khan's court had their bloodlust satiated in the jungles of Southeast Asia, reddening their blades and filling their pockets with enough loot to overlook their Khan's conversion to Buddhism, those back in Mongolia didn't feel like they were so much the vanguard of a glorious global empire as the subjects of a distant tyrant.

Much of Mongolia itself had become as fractious and lawless under Kublai as it was before the rise of Genghis, and chaffing under the increasing bureaucracy, Nayan, a descendant of Genghis Khan's half-brother Belgutei, allied with Kaidu, leader of a rival Mongolian Khanate that had backed Kublai's younger brother in the earlier civil war, and led a rebellion against Kublai.

Kublai, either believing the threat was so great that he had to personally respond, or that as his identity as a Mongol was at stake, he had to be seen to retaliate in the manner of his forefathers, personally lead an army to put down this revolt in 1287. Aged 72 and suffering with gout and rheumatism, Kublai could no longer ride and was carried on a palanquin on the backs of four elephants, but he insisted on taking to the field in his blue and gold armour.

Taking the rebels by surprise, the battle lasted from mid-morning until mid-day, and at its end Nayan was executed in the traditional manner of Mongol royalty: wrapped in carpet and dragged behind a horse until he died, so that "the blood of the lineage of the emperor" wasn't spilt on the ground, a taboo in Mongol culture.

For all his civility and his pretensions to imperial grandeur, when push came to shove, Kublai ruled as a Khan – with the steppe galloping past beneath him and his enemies falling like leaves. Though Kaidu continued to raid Yuan territory, his allies were brutally punished, their armies redistributed among the Khan's loyalists. Eventually Kublai's own grandson was dispatched to bring this truculent warlord to heel. After waging war for over 30 years, Kaidu would die from wounds sustained in battle in 1301.

As much as he disgusted the traditionalists among his people, discarding their shamanistic faith for Buddhism and ruling from China, Kublai Khan expanded the Mongol Empire to its greatest extent, a landmass covering 85.5 million square kilometres and over 100 million people from the fringes of Europe to the Far East. What's more, his innovations in infrastructure and statecraft, as much as his powerful fighting force, honoured the legacy of Genghis Khan like no other Khan could.

Genghis built an empire from the saddle, but Kublai built a civilisation from the court.

A PAIZA

THE ANCESTOR OF THE MODERN PASSPORT CHINA, 13TH CENTURY

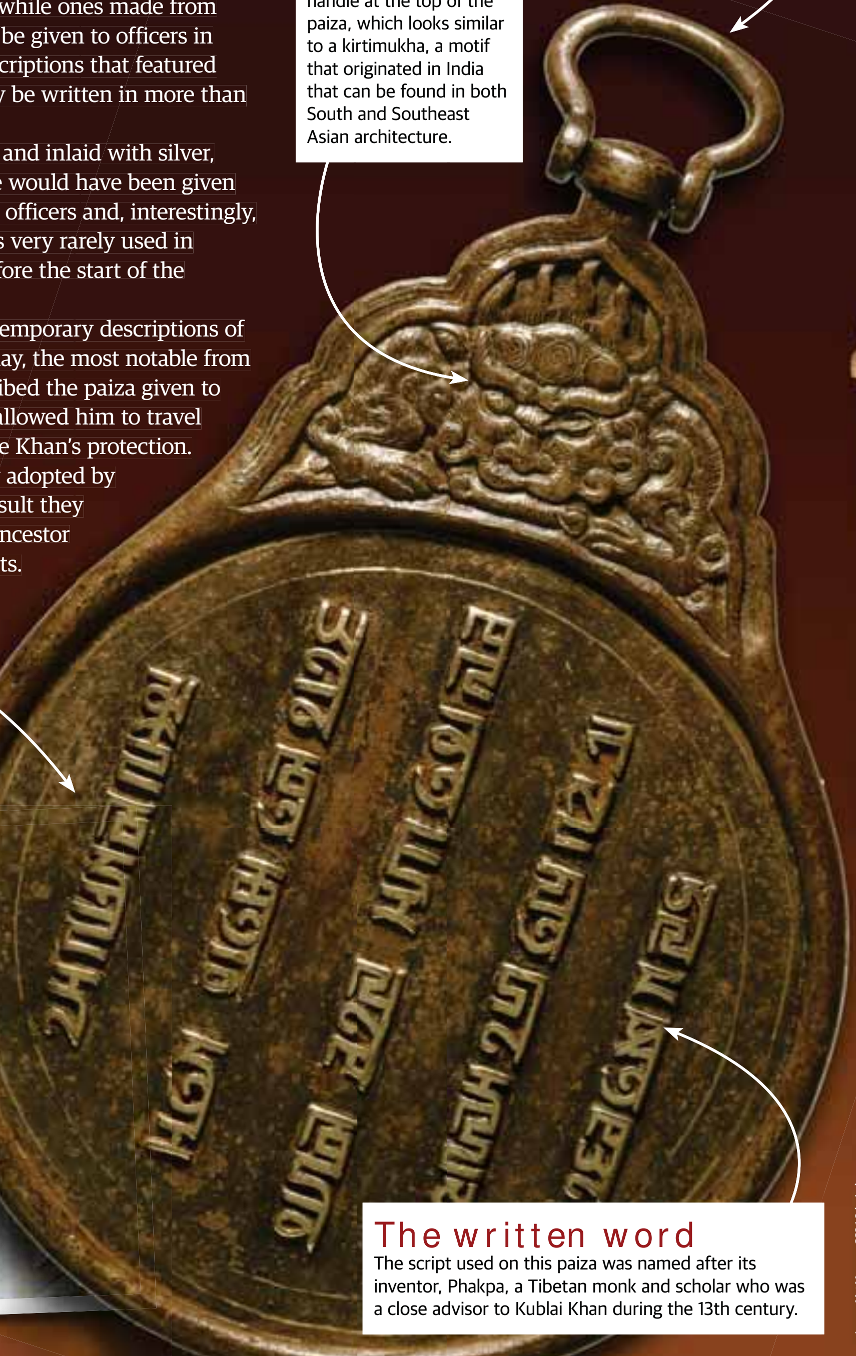
A paiza (also known as a gerege) was a tablet and diplomatic passport issued as a mark of authority to officials or important guests, notably Marco Polo, to ensure their safe passage throughout the Mongol Empire. Derived from 'páizi', the Chinese word for both 'plate' and 'sign,' a paiza also allowed the holder to use postal stations and request food, lodgings and bodyguards during their journey, and it even gave permission for their expenses to be paid.

Although Genghis Khan is often credited with developing the paiza, they were actually based on similar items used by the earlier Liao dynasty in northern China, which were typically oblong in shape. However, round versions such as this one were made during the Yuan dynasty, established by Kublai Khan following his successful conquest of China. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where this particular paiza is currently held, it bears the ominous inscription, "By the strength of Eternal Heaven, an edict of the Emperor (Khan). He who has no respect shall be guilty," written in Phags-pa script.

Paizas could be made from wood, iron, copper, bronze, silver and gold, depending on whom it was intended for. For example, paizas featuring raised gold characters would be issued to messengers tasked with carrying urgent military orders from the court, while ones made from lesser materials would be given to officers in the provinces - the inscriptions that featured on these would usually be written in more than one language.

Made from cast iron and inlaid with silver, paizas such as this one would have been given to senior commanding officers and, interestingly, silver inlay on iron was very rarely used in Chinese metalwork before the start of the Mongol period.

There are a few contemporary descriptions of paizas that survive today, the most notable from Marco Polo, who described the paiza given to him by Kublai, which allowed him to travel the Silk Road under the Khan's protection. Paizas were eventually adopted by Europeans, and as a result they are often cited as the ancestor to the modern passports.



Travel friendly

A paiza made from cast iron like this one would have been very heavy; however, the ring on the top meant that it could be attached to a belt or even worn around the neck with a cord.

Legendary creature

There is a Tibetan style lion mask head on the handle at the top of the paiza, which looks similar to a kirtimukha, a motif that originated in India that can be found in both South and Southeast Asian architecture.

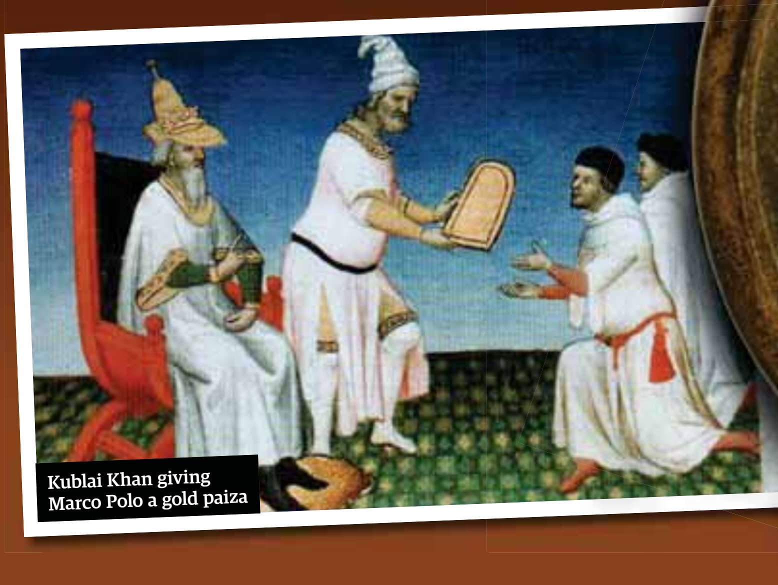
Stamp of authority

This particular paiza is double-sided and the inscription is inverted on the other side. Since the characters are raised, it could be used to stamp documents if needed and therefore was likely to have been given to a senior military officer.

The written word

The script used on this paiza was named after its inventor, Phakpa, a Tibetan monk and scholar who was a close advisor to Kublai Khan during the 13th century.

Image: Met Museum CC0 1.0 (paiza)



Kublai Khan giving Marco Polo a gold paiza

MARCO POLO

N
NE
E
SE
S
SW
W
NW

JOURNEY TO THE COURT OF KUBLAI KHAN

TRAVELLING TO LOCATIONS SO EXOTIC MANY WOULD NOT BELIEVE HIS TALES, MARCO POLO LIVED AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE FILLED WITH WONDERMENT AND AWE

Written by John Man

Marco Polo's life sounds like a fairy story. An ordinary boy from Venice is taken by his father and uncle across Asia and meets the world's most powerful ruler, who employs him for 17 years, after which he returns home and records his journey in the most famous travel book of all time. It is an exceptional story, and true (mostly). Even more remarkable - it came about by a succession of pure chances.

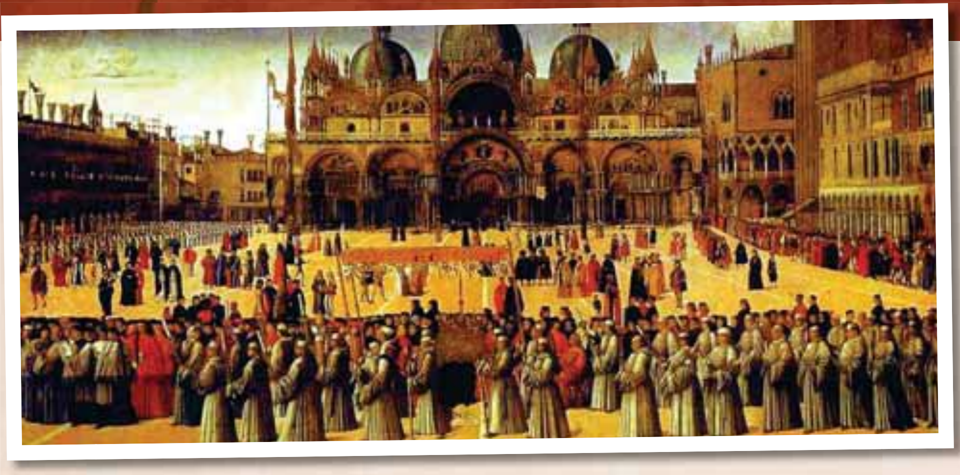
In 1253, a year before Marco's birth, his father Niccolò and uncle Maffeo left Venice for Constantinople, the capital of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. It had been made a Christian city by Emperor Constantine and was now the seat of Orthodox Christianity, as opposed to Rome, the seat of the Catholic west. But Constantinople was in decline, its economy dominated by foreign traders, notably Venetians. Bringing a ship-load of wares, Niccolò and Maffeo set about exchanging their goods for jewels. After six years of profitable trade - and probably unaware of Marco's birth - they looked towards Crimea, where they could use their jewels to buy Russian wheat, wax, salted fish and Baltic amber, all much in demand in Europe.

Here fate played a role - several times over. They found that the two Venetian trading bases, Soldaia (today's Sudak) and Caffa (Feodosiya), were just inside the newly established Mongol Empire. Crimea, taken by the Mongols in 1238, was part of the so-called Golden Horde, the western section of an empire that stretched from Russia to China. To escape rivals they headed on east 1,000 kilometres to the local capital, Sarai, a city of tents and wagons on the Volga.

After another successful year, they were about to set off home when they learned that Venice's rival city-state, Genoa, had driven the Venetians out of Constantinople. There was only one route possible: eastwards again to Bukhara, then a long return via Afghanistan. But once again fate intervened. A civil war between Mongol sub-states penned them in Bukhara for three years. At that point an envoy from Persia's Mongol ruler met them, and he was astonished to find two 'Latins' who by now spoke good Mongol. He told them to go on eastwards, all the way to China, where his lord and master, Genghis Khan's grandson Kublai, would give them a good welcome. "Sirs," he said, in Marco's account, "You will have great profit from it, and great honour." They would not be the first Europeans to be guided across Asia along the Mongol pony-express routes, but their two predecessors, both priests, had gone to Mongolia, not China.

The Polos arrived in Kublai's capital, Xanadu, and were well received. As luck would have it, Kublai was in need of a Christian presence to counterbalance the influence of local religions. He asked the two Venetians to go home and return with 100 priests and some holy oil from Jerusalem (perhaps to be used as a magic charm). He gave them a golden safe-conduct pass that allowed them to use the imperial post-roads and sent them off. After another three years of travel,

Illustration: Joe Cummings



Marco Polo's Venice

Medieval Venice, once a village in a bog, was a place of palaces, canals and glorious churches. From his birth, probably in 1254, Marco, raised in a fine merchant's house near the Rialto Bridge, would have admired the ornate splendours of St Marks, its west portal displaying four Roman bronze horses seized from Constantinople in 1204. He would have seen the city's ruler, the Doge, in state rituals designed to emphasise power and wealth reaching far beyond the city.

With a navy that dominated the eastern Mediterranean, Venice had built an empire, with colonies, ports and islands by the dozen down the Adriatic coast. It owned Crete. Venetian enclaves drew merchants around Greece, to Constantinople and eastwards, across the Black Sea to Crimea, where two bases gave access to the Russian 'river-roads' of the Don and Volga. But these bases now provided access not just to Russia but to all Asia.

In 1238, Crimea had fallen to a vast new entity – the empire built by Genghis Khan, and now, 30 years after his death, it was ruled by his family, all owing allegiance to Genghis' grandson Kublai, 6,000 kilometres away in China.

the brothers reached Venice. It was 1269. They had been away 16 years, to find that Niccolò's wife had died and their son Marco was a well-educated 15 year old ready to see the world.

Two years later, in September 1271, father and uncle set off again with Marco via Jerusalem to pick up the holy oil. By yet another chance, a local prelate, Tedaldo Visconti, had just been made pope. Hoping that all China would fall to Christianity, he wrote a hasty letter to Kublai urging conversion. He also gave them two - not 100 - priests, who quickly turned back.

The journey rapidly became an epic. There was war everywhere: Muslims fighting Crusaders, Mongol sub-empires fighting each other. Their golden pass would be no guarantee of safe-conduct. They avoided trouble by heading through eastern Turkey, Iraq and Persia, down to the port of Hormuz (present day Bandar-e 'Abbās). The exact route is unclear, because by the time Marco came to dictate his story his memory was vague and he himself an unreliable witness.

Even so, his account contains much truth. He claims to have been chased by robbers known as Caraunas ruled by a king called Nogodar. This

is a reference to a Mongol frontier force called Qaragunas and their commander Negüder, who turned themselves into marauders swinging unpredictably between loyalty, rebellion and pillaging. Their descendants became today's Hazara and Mogholi minorities in Afghanistan.

Hormuz was a major port and appallingly hot, where a certain wind, the simoom, could cook a corpse. Perhaps they were hoping to sail to India but were put off by boats stitched together with coconut twine. They back-tracked to the northeast across present-day Iran, picking up details of the Assassins, the murderous Muslim sect named 'hashishin' after their supposed habit of smoking hashish.

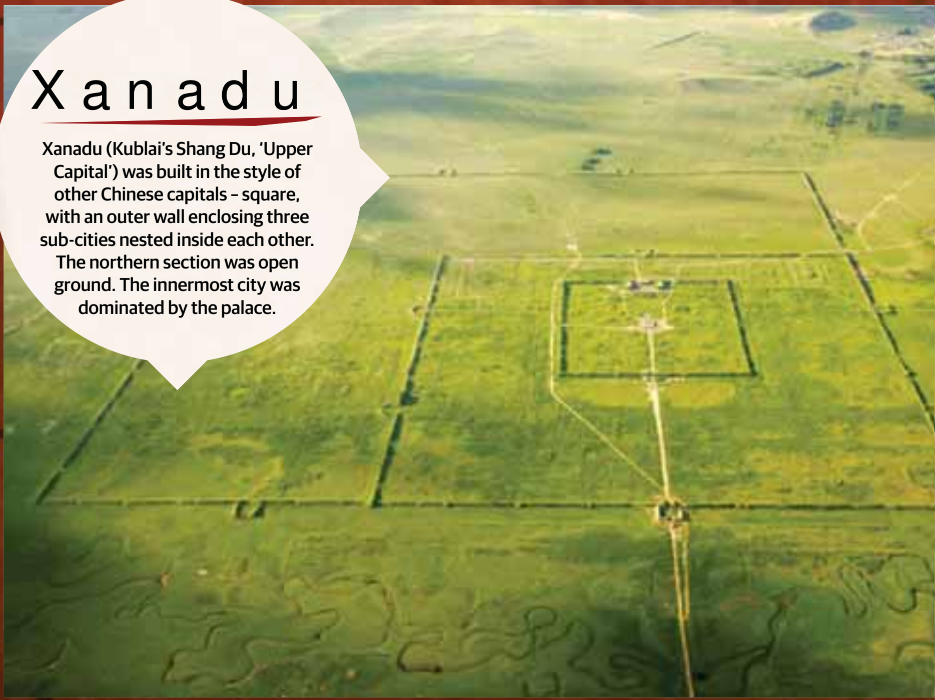
Marco tells fanciful tales of young men drugged, taken into a beautiful garden and seduced by damsels "singing and playing and making all the caresses and dalliances which they could imagine," before being sent off to kill. The assassins' HQ, Alamut, a grim fortress in the Elburz Mountains, was actually 700 kilometres off Marco's route, but the stories would have been current, because the Mongols destroyed Alamut and the Assassins themselves in 1257.

In Afghanistan, Marco describes Balkh, twice ruined by Genghis Khan but now somewhat resurrected as "a noble city and great". He also reveals that he had a young man's eye for female beauty. In one area, the inhabitants were very handsome, "especially the women, who are beautiful beyond measure," and in another women padded themselves with cotton trousers "to make themselves look large in the hips".

Then onwards and upwards, through what would become the Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip of Afghanistan formed by Britain in the 19th century to create a barrier between British India and imperial Russia. It was an established route into China but a tough and awe-inspiring one through the Pamir Mountains, where glaciers grind down from 6,000-metre-high peaks and (according to Marco) the cold was so intense that no birds flew. He followed the Wakhan River up into a land of perpetual snow, where there lived huge sheep with horns 1.5 metres across, the sheep that would, in 1840, be named after him: *Ovis poli*, the Marco Polo Sheep. He liked it up there because the pure air cured him of some unspecified complaint.

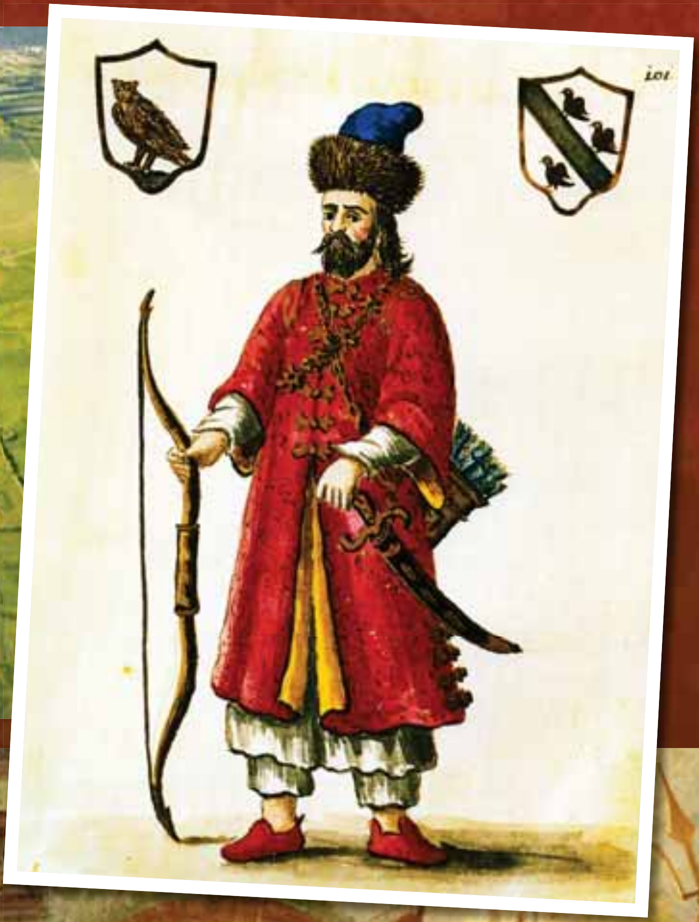
Descending from the 5,000-metre Wakhjir Pass, Marco and the elder Polos – presumably with a train of horses, camels, yaks and guides – would have come to the caravanserai of what is today Tashkurgan, some 250 kilometres south of Kashgar. Marco does not mention this part of the journey, despite the narrow track, tumbling river and teetering bridges of the Gez Defile and the lone, glaciated bulk of Muztagh Ata, the Father of Ice Mountain. His memory was dominated by the gardens, vineyards and estates of Kashgar, the first major city inside today's China. Then, as now, this was Uyghur territory. Marco is rude about the Uyghurs, "a wretched, niggardly set of people, who eat ill and drink more ill." In fact,

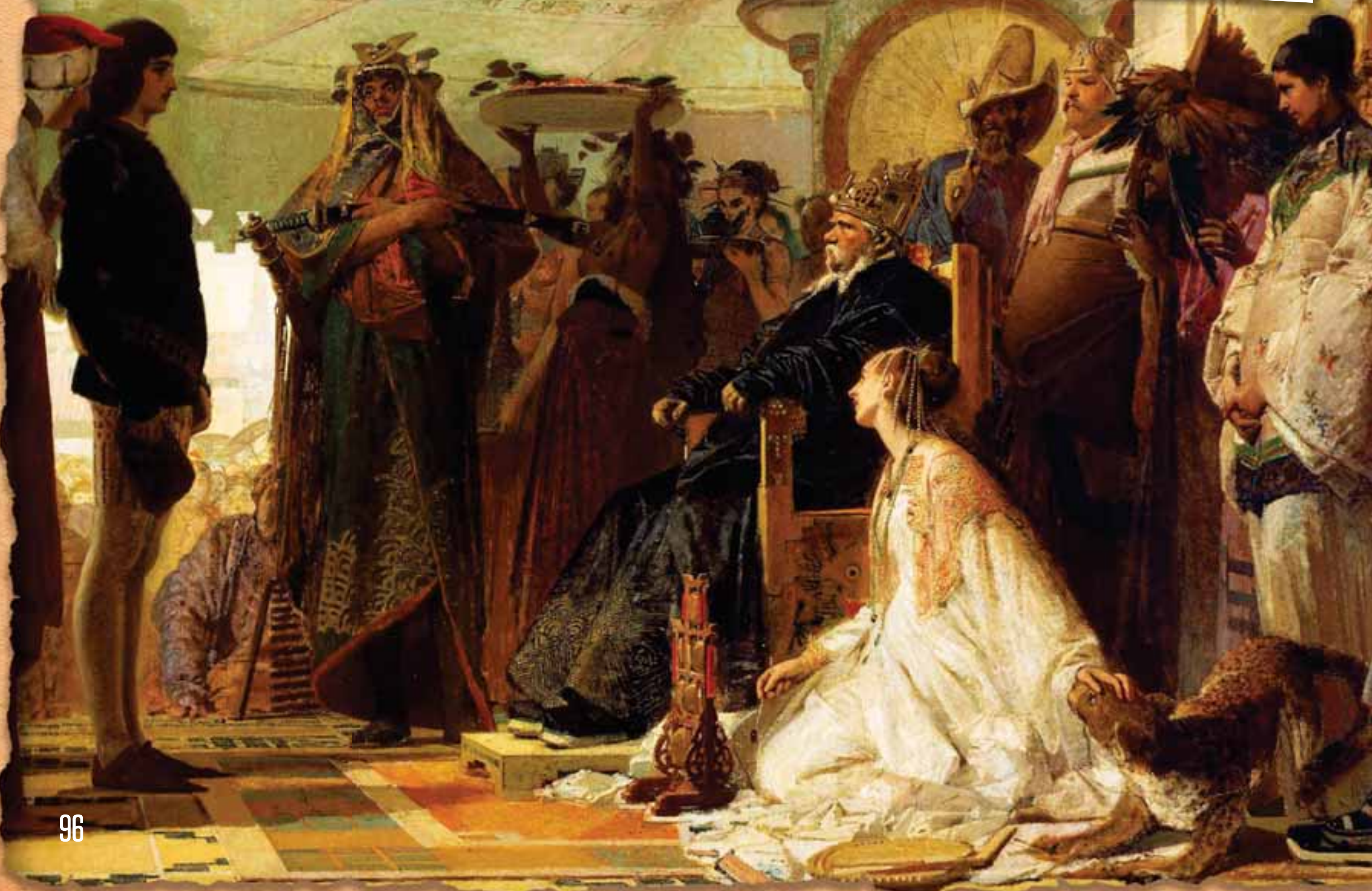
Image: Sol 90 (main)



Xanadu

Xanadu (Kublai's Shang Du, 'Upper Capital') was built in the style of other Chinese capitals – square, with an outer wall enclosing three sub-cities nested inside each other. The northern section was open ground. The innermost city was dominated by the palace.





Marco was about 21 years old when he first met Kublai Khan, and he would stay with the emperor for 17 years they were a sophisticated people with their own writing system, whose scholars were valued as scribes across much of Asia.

East of Kashgar lies the dead heart of Asia, the gravel wastes and shifting dunes of the Tarim Basin, with country-sized wildernesses: the deserts of the Taklamakan, Lop, Gashun Gobi and Kumtag. Nothing much grows here but scattered camel-thorns, and very little lives but sand-flies, ticks and a diffuse population of wild camels. Marco plays up the dangers, speaking of sand-spirits and demon voices calling men to their deaths. No Medieval traveller would have crossed it – they didn't have to, because there was a long-established route, later to be termed the Silk Road, that led along the southern fringes, from oasis to oasis, fed by rivers running down from the Kunlun Mountains. Marco mentions towns – Yarkan, Khotan, Charchan – which still exist. Others have vanished beneath the drifting sands, notably Loulan, whose rediscovered ruins are now off-limits because China tests its nuclear weapons nearby.

> "Marco was as close to the emperor as any minister"

This is China's far west, and it was Kublai's far west as well. Like a comet at the edge of the Solar System, Marco was now beginning the long, slow fall towards Xanadu, the empire's sun. But Kublai's control of the Western Regions, referred to by Marco as "Great Turkey," was tenuous. Much of it was claimed by Kublai's rebellious cousin, Kaidu, who remained a thorn in Kublai's side for 40 years.

Marco tells a good story about Kaidu: he had a daughter, the formidable Aijaruc (which he says means Bright Moon; in fact it means Moonlight). So big – "almost like a giantess" – strong and brave was she that no man could match her. Kaidu doted on her, and wanted to marry her off. But she always refused, saying she would only marry a man who could beat her in wrestling. Every challenger had to put up 100 horses. After 100 bouts, Aijaruc had 10,000 horses. Then a rich and powerful prince arrived, offering 1,000 horses. They wrestled. She won. Thereafter, Kaidu took her on campaigns, where she proved her worth dashing into the enemy to seize some man "as deftly as a hawk pounces on a bird." Is there any truth in this? A little. Mongolian women did indeed have a reputation for toughness, and Kaidu did indeed have a favourite daughter, but her name was Khutulun.

At the eastern end of the desert, Marco passed the western end of the Great Wall, built 1,000 years before to keep out nomads like the Mongols. It would not have looked great to him, because it was made of reeds and earth and had been abandoned for half a century, with the Mongols ruling on both sides of it. If he noticed it at all, he did not think it worth a mention.

By now (probably the spring of 1275) it seems he and his entourage had been noticed.

Messengers had galloped ahead with news that foreigners were coming – Mongol-speakers, bearing a golden pass, without doubt the 'Latins' who had been in Kublai's court ten years previously. Guards rode "a full 40 days" to meet them and guide them to Xanadu, where Kublai was in residence.

At this point, perhaps because the surroundings were greener, Marco speaks of two animals. It is sometimes asked if Marco actually experienced everything he described. The answer is almost always. These descriptions are proof. The first refers to a species of shaggy cattle, which he said with some exaggeration were "as large as elephants". This is the first western description of a yak, then unknown in Europe. The second is a deer the size of a dog, which he calls "a very pretty creature". It is a musk deer, from the neck gland of which comes the musk so desired by perfume-makers. He even guesses at its Mongolian name, gudderi – khüder in modern Mongolian – which no one could learn except by experience.

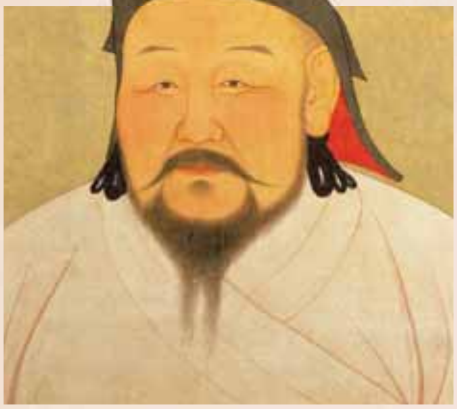
Now half way across modern China, Marco came to Yinchuan, which had been the capital of the Tangut people, a separate empire known as Western Xia, which had been destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1227. Marco's terminology is not exactly right but almost so. He picked up the Mongol name for the city of Yinchuan (Egrigaia in his text, Eriqaya in Mongolian), and the name of the local mountain range (Helan Shan, which he transcribed as the similar-sounding Calachan).

On then across the Ordos region of Inner Mongolia, past villages and cultivated fields to a place of "a great many crafts such as provide for the Emperor's troops". This was Xuanhua, on the main road leading from today's Beijing to what was once the Mongolian border. Here, he would have turned right for Beijing, Kublai's new capital, or left for Xanadu, Kublai's first capital and now his summer residence. It was summer. His guides knew that their lord was in Xanadu. There was only another 250 kilometres to go.

Xanadu is a name derived from the Chinese Shang Du, 'Upper Capital,' as opposed to Beijing, which was Dadu, 'Great Capital'. We spell it that way because that was how the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge spelled it in his famous poem written on waking from a dream in 1797:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

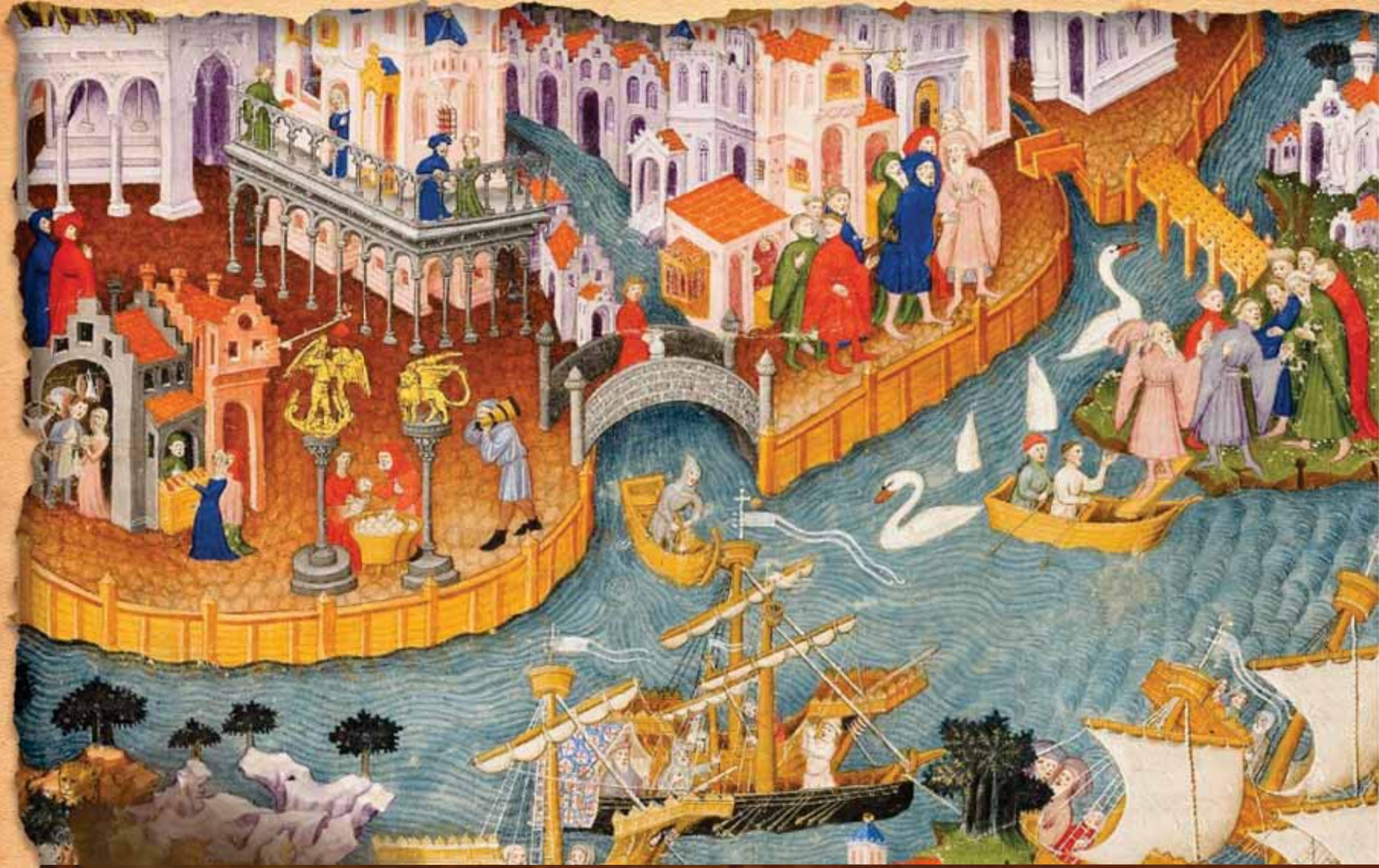
There was a 'pleasure dome', but no caves, or Alph, and the Pacific is almost 400 kilometres away. Xanadu was and is on the Mongolian plateau, a place of rolling grasslands and low hills. In Marco's day, this Chinese-style city

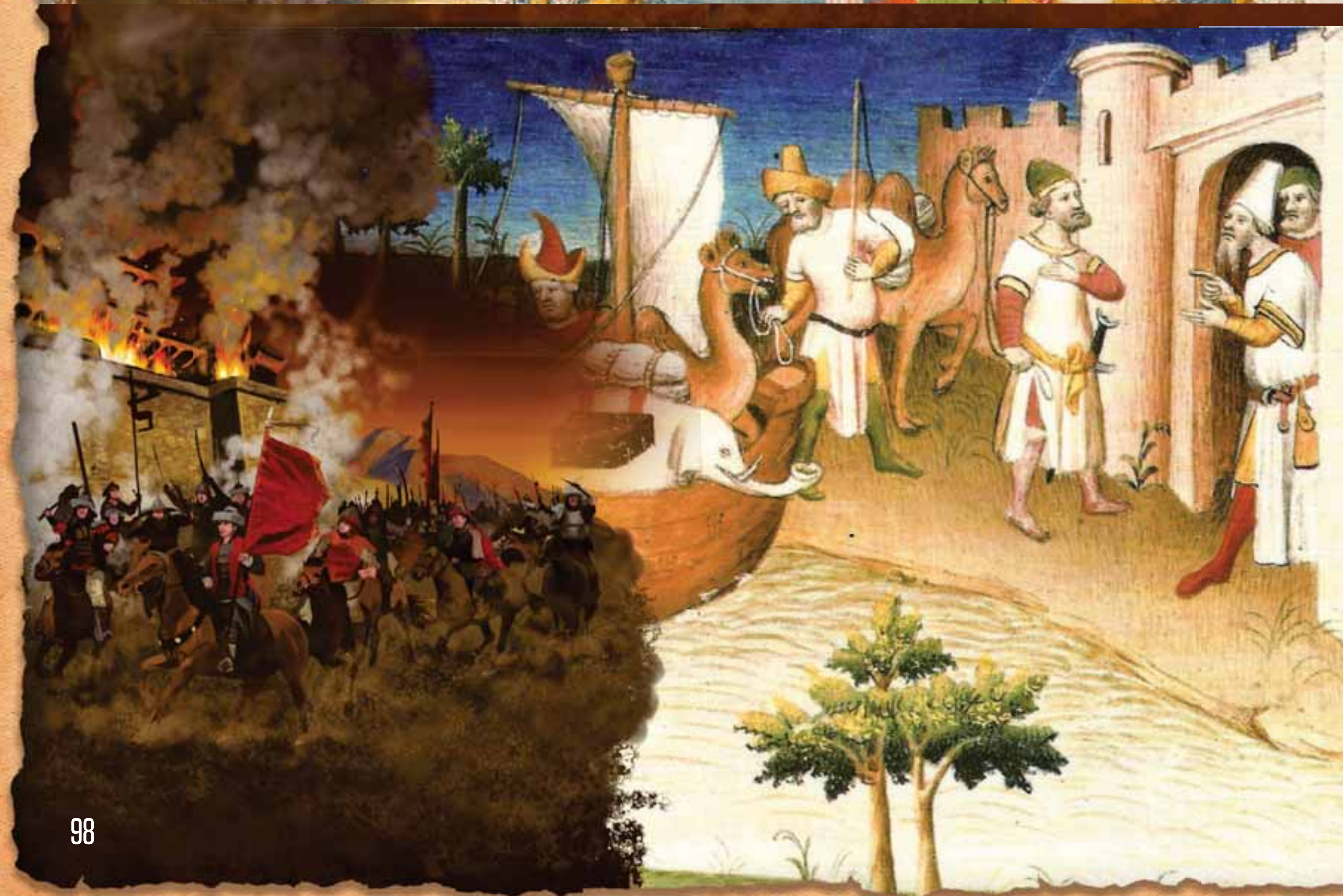


The real 'pleasure dome'

Marco described what he called a 'Cane Palace' in Xanadu, recalled in Coleridge's poem: "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/ A stately pleasure dome decree." Because the poem records a dream, the palace is easily dismissed as a legend. In fact, Marco described a real building. By 'Cane' he meant bamboo, available in semi-tropical Yunnan, conquered by Kublai in 1253. Cut in half lengthwise to form overlapping 15-metre 'tiles', bamboo stems formed a domed roof. To counteract the lift induced by high winds on the aerofoil roof, it was held down with '200 silken cords', in Marco's words. Probably used as a hunting lodge in summer, its real purpose was political – it symbolised Kublai's two cultures, Mongolian and Chinese. It combined the style of a Mongolian tent – easily dismantled for winter storage – with Chinese materials and techniques.

Images: Getty Images (21-year-old Marco)





Marco's impact

Marco's book was dictated in haste while a prisoner of war in Genoa in 1299. It is usually called *Description Of The World*, or simply *Travels*. Since the book predated printing it was 'published' by scribes and translators. The original was lost, and the copies were corrupted by additions, deletions and errors. Since there was no other information, people came to see the *Travels* as a collection of fables.

It took almost exactly two centuries for his book to make its greatest impact. As learning took off in the 15th century, accounts by later travellers suggested that he was essentially truthful. The late-15th century was the great age of exploration as Europeans tried to reach the east, seeking trade with southeast Asia and the Chinese mainland, known as Cathay (Cataia, as Marco called north China, from the Mongolian 'Khiatad').

As the Portuguese opened the sea-route round southern Africa, Christopher Columbus, inspired by both Marco and a map based on his account, suggested a quicker route westwards across the Atlantic, thus reaching China directly. But the Portuguese were committed to the African route and rejected Columbus, who proposed the same idea to the Spanish rulers, Ferdinand and Isabella. With nothing to lose, they backed him. The result: Columbus' discovery in 1492 that the ocean did not stretch all the way to China: there was another continent in the way. Columbus thought he had arrived in China. It was, of course, America.

had 120,000 inhabitants, approached along the so-called Royal Road, which cut through a mass of round felt tents, horses, camels and traders.

Guided through the main gate to "a very fine marble palace," the three were taken into an audience with Kublai. He was delighted to see his 'Latin' envoys back again. Marco was overwhelmed with admiration of "the most potent man that ever hath existed". They knelt, then prostrated themselves, rose and described their journey. They presented the pope's letter and the holy oil. Then Kublai asked about Marco.

"Sire," said Niccolò, "He is my son and your liegeman," handing Marco over to Kublai's service.

"Welcome is he too," said Kublai, beginning a relationship that would last 17 years. In that time Marco was as close to the emperor as any minister, perhaps closer, because Kublai valued him as an independent source of information, untouched by the court's many rival groups. Speaking good Mongolian, Marco went on at least five great journeys to the corners of Kublai's Chinese possessions, probably to gather information on foreigners and minorities. Almost certainly he was a member of the emperor's Keshig, his 12,000-strong personal bodyguard. Later, he wrote of what he saw for Europe's Christian readers but did not reveal why he was sent, probably because it implied too close a relationship with a non-Christian ruler.

Between his journeys he experienced court life in all its magnificence. He accompanied Kublai as he travelled between Xanadu and his new main capital, Beijing, a journey that took three weeks, with Kublai riding in a specially designed room strapped onto four elephants, harnessed abreast. Beijing, chosen because it was the key to the conquest and rule of all China, was built almost from scratch after the destruction caused by Kublai's grandfather, Genghis Khan: temples, gardens, lakes and a palace of varnished woodwork and glittering tiles. Uncounted halls, treasure rooms, offices and apartments surrounded an audience hall that could host 6,000 diners. In nearby parklands, deer and gazelle grazed. Court life revolved around 150 long-established rituals, controlled by four government departments and a Board of Rites. Other departments regimented 17,000 scholar-officials. The three main state occasions were the Khan's birthday at the end of September, New Year's Day and the spring hunt.

> "Kublai valued him as an independent source of information"

For New Year's Day and the Khan's birthday, gifts flowed from the far reaches of the empire. Horses, elephants and camels paraded, thousands dressed in white (for luck) touched their foreheads to the floor in adulation and joined a vast feast, with the emperor and his entourage on a raised platform, served by ministers with napkins stuffed in their mouths, so that "no breath or odour from their persons should taint the dish or the goblets presented to the Lord".

On 1 March, Kublai supervised hunting on an industrial scale. In 40 days the hunt covered some 500 kilometres. Marco describes 14,000 huntsmen and 10,000 falconers (though the numbers are probably exaggerated) with gyrfalcons, eagles, peregrines, hawks and goshawks, backed by 2,000 mastiff-like dogs, all hunting hare, foxes, deer, boar, and even wolves. At night, the emperor camped in a tent-city that surrounded his own huge tent, which was lined with ermine and sable furs and waterproofed with tiger skins. By day the emperor was in his vast howdah on his four elephants.

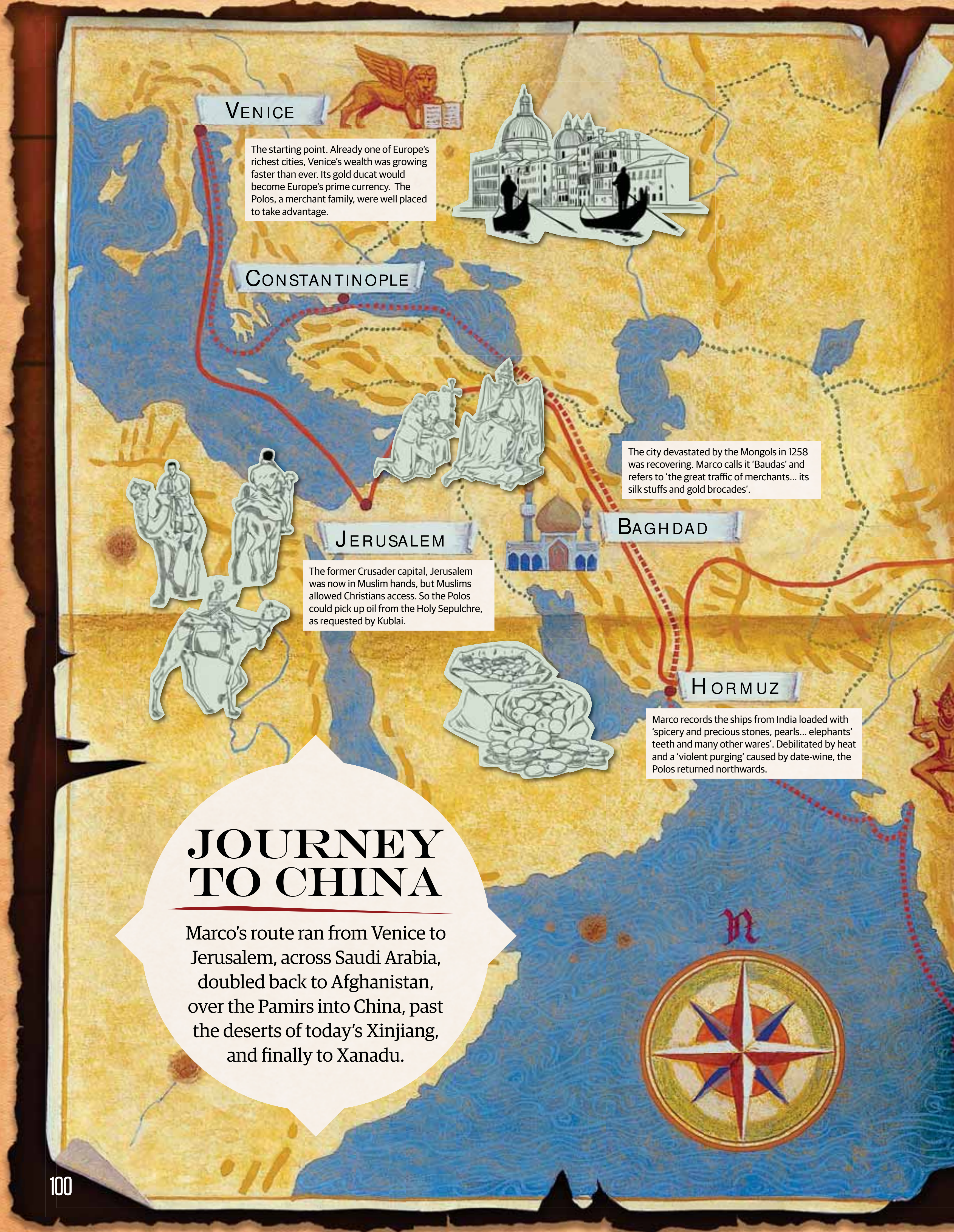
Marco described the scene: "And sometimes as they may be going along, the Emperor from his chamber is holding discourse with his barons, one of the latter shall exclaim: 'Sire! Look out for cranes!' then the Emperor instantly has the top of his chamber thrown open, and having marked the cranes, he casts one of his gyrfalcons."

For Marco, this life ended in 1292. Kublai was old, obese and in poor health. Marco, his father and uncle were nervous of their future under a new ruler. Kublai unwillingly allowed them to leave by sea as companions for a princess who was to be married to one of Kublai's relatives in Persia. They arrived home in 1296, two years after Kublai's death.

Illustration: Joe Cummings (fortress raid)

JOURNEY TO CHINA

Marco's route ran from Venice to Jerusalem, across Saudi Arabia, doubled back to Afghanistan, over the Pamirs into China, past the deserts of today's Xinjiang, and finally to Xanadu.



VENICE

The starting point. Already one of Europe's richest cities, Venice's wealth was growing faster than ever. Its gold ducat would become Europe's prime currency. The Polos, a merchant family, were well placed to take advantage.

CONSTANTINOPLE

BAGHDAD

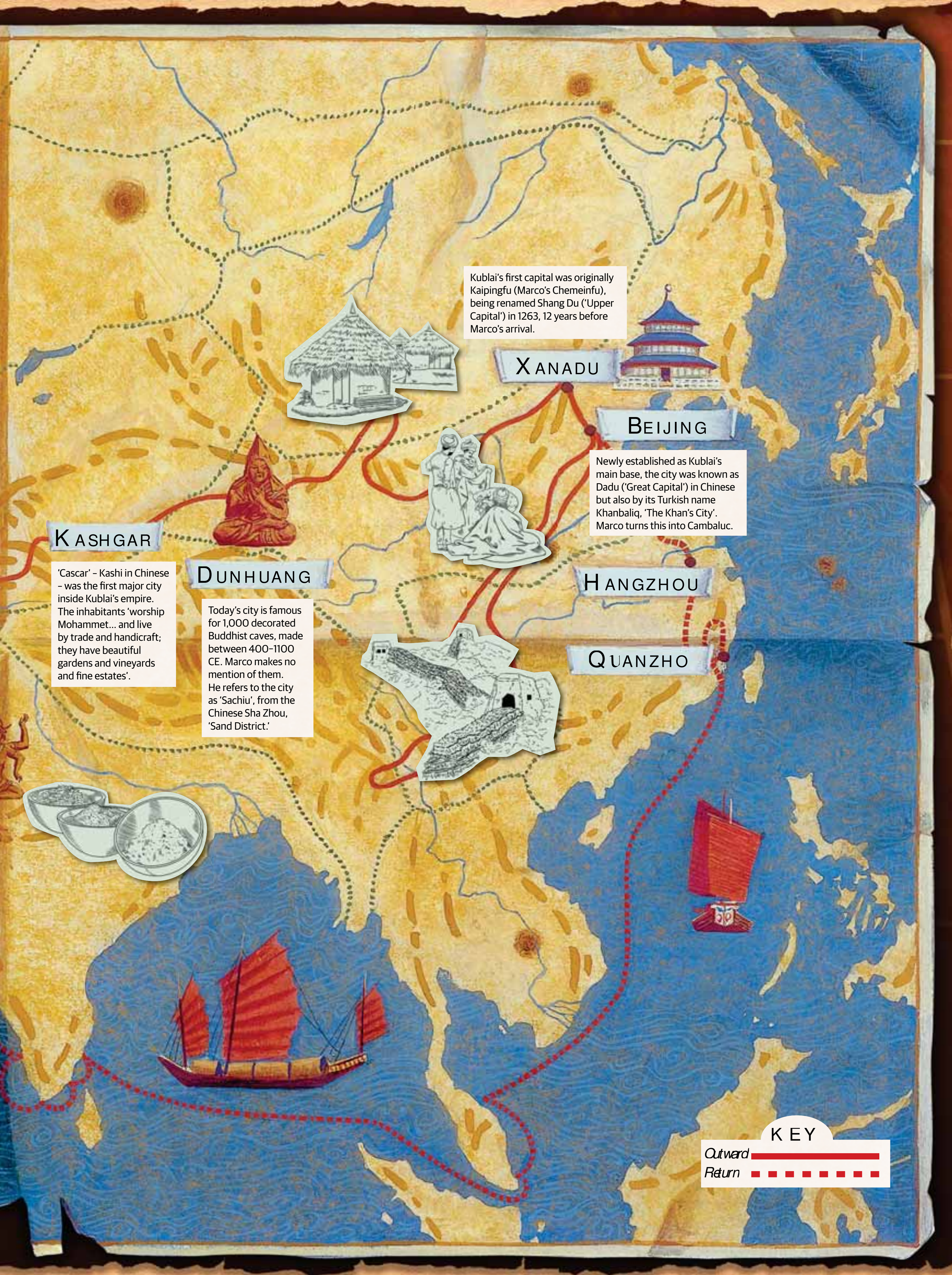
The city devastated by the Mongols in 1258 was recovering. Marco calls it 'Baudas' and refers to 'the great traffic of merchants… its silk stuffs and gold brocades'.

JERUSALEM

The former Crusader capital, Jerusalem was now in Muslim hands, but Muslims allowed Christians access. So the Polos could pick up oil from the Holy Sepulchre, as requested by Kublai.

HORMUZ

Marco records the ships from India loaded with 'spicery and precious stones, pearls… elephants' teeth and many other wares'. Debilitated by heat and a 'violent purging' caused by date-wine, the Polos returned northwards.



Kublai's first capital was originally Kaipingfu (Marco's Chemeinfu), being renamed Shang Du ('Upper Capital') in 1263, 12 years before Marco's arrival.

Newly established as Kublai's main base, the city was known as Dadu ('Great Capital') in Chinese but also by its Turkish name Khanbaliq, 'The Khan's City'. Marco turns this into Cambaluc.

'Cascar' – Kashi in Chinese – was the first major city inside Kublai's empire. The inhabitants 'worship Mohammet... and live by trade and handicraft; they have beautiful gardens and vineyards and fine estates'.

Today's city is famous for 1,000 decorated Buddhist caves, made between 400-1100 CE. Marco makes no mention of them. He refers to the city as 'Sachiu', from the Chinese Sha Zhou, 'Sand District.'

Images: Getty Images (map); Kym Winters (spot map illustrations)

THE MONGOL Ger

MONGOLIAN STEPPE, C.600 BCE – PRESENT

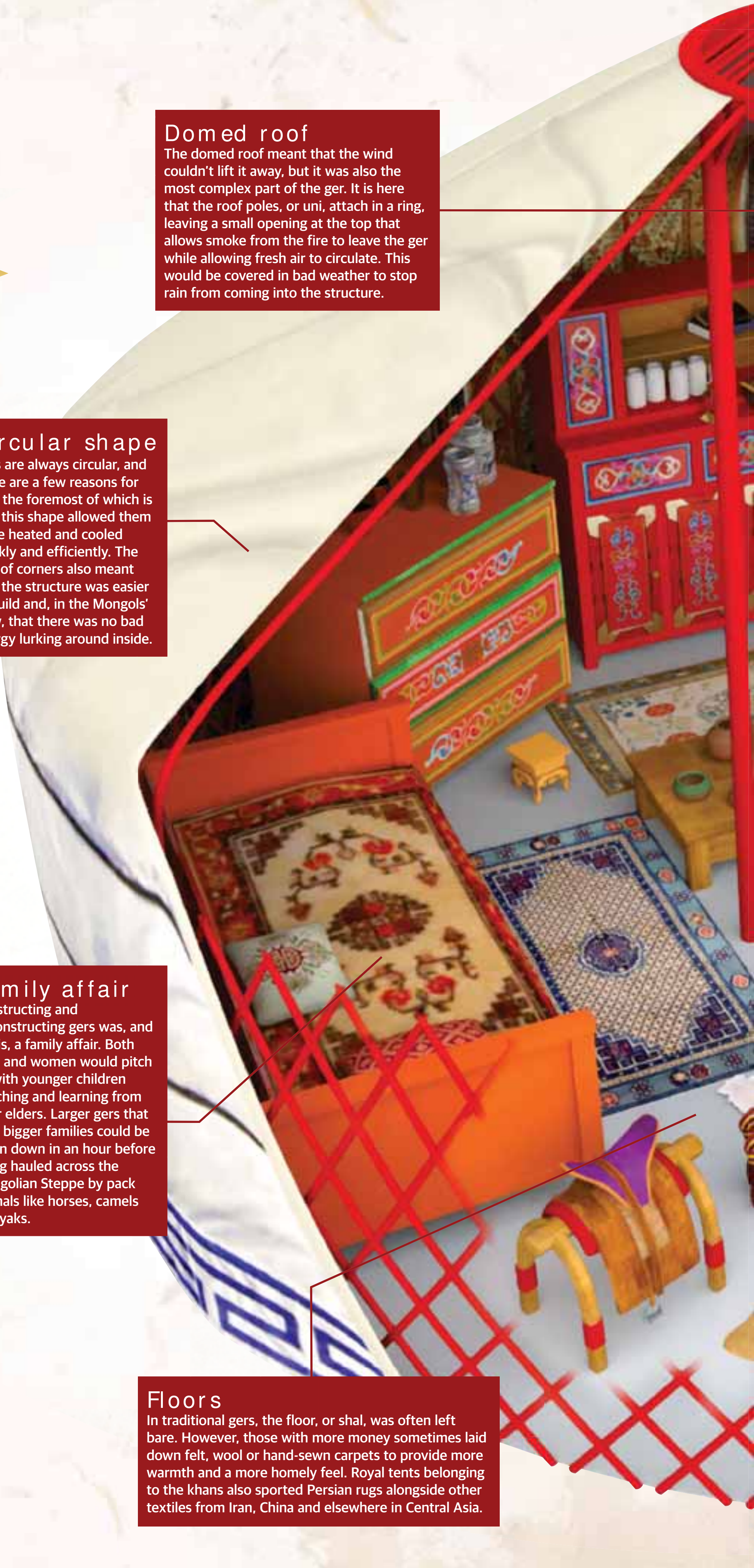
When the wind howls through the Mongolian Steppe, or the rain is beating down, Mongolian nomads have never really needed to worry. Sheltered inside their gers, they're safe from the elements as they bunker down with the family in their homes.

Gers have been in use for over 2,000 years, and they have changed little in that time. Perfect for a nomadic lifestyle, the gers are easy to deconstruct, carry and then rebuild when Mongolians have needed to move to find better land for grazing. Always circular, the walls of the temporary buildings are made from lightweight wood that forms a lattice to make it easily collapsible, and this shell is then covered in felt and woollen covers before a layer of waterproof canvas is draped over the entire structure.

Inside, nomads have carried out their daily lives for centuries. There's a stove for cooking and heat; an altar for shamanists and Buddhists to carry out their worship; and room for up to 15 people to live and sleep, with men in the western half and women in the eastern half. While gers have no windows, there is one door leading to the outside.

The striking and reconstructing of the ger has always been a family event. Taking between 30 minutes and three hours, the men build the walls, while everyone helps with the layering of the felts and canvas. Children learn from the elders in the community, just like in everything else.

The traditional craftsmanship it takes to build the Mongolian gers has recently become recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO – a recognition of more than 2,000 years of cultural heritage on the Mongolian Steppe. With around 30 per cent of Mongolians still living a nomadic lifestyle today, and cities all over the country having ger districts, the gers are still just as much in use as they were 2,000 years ago.

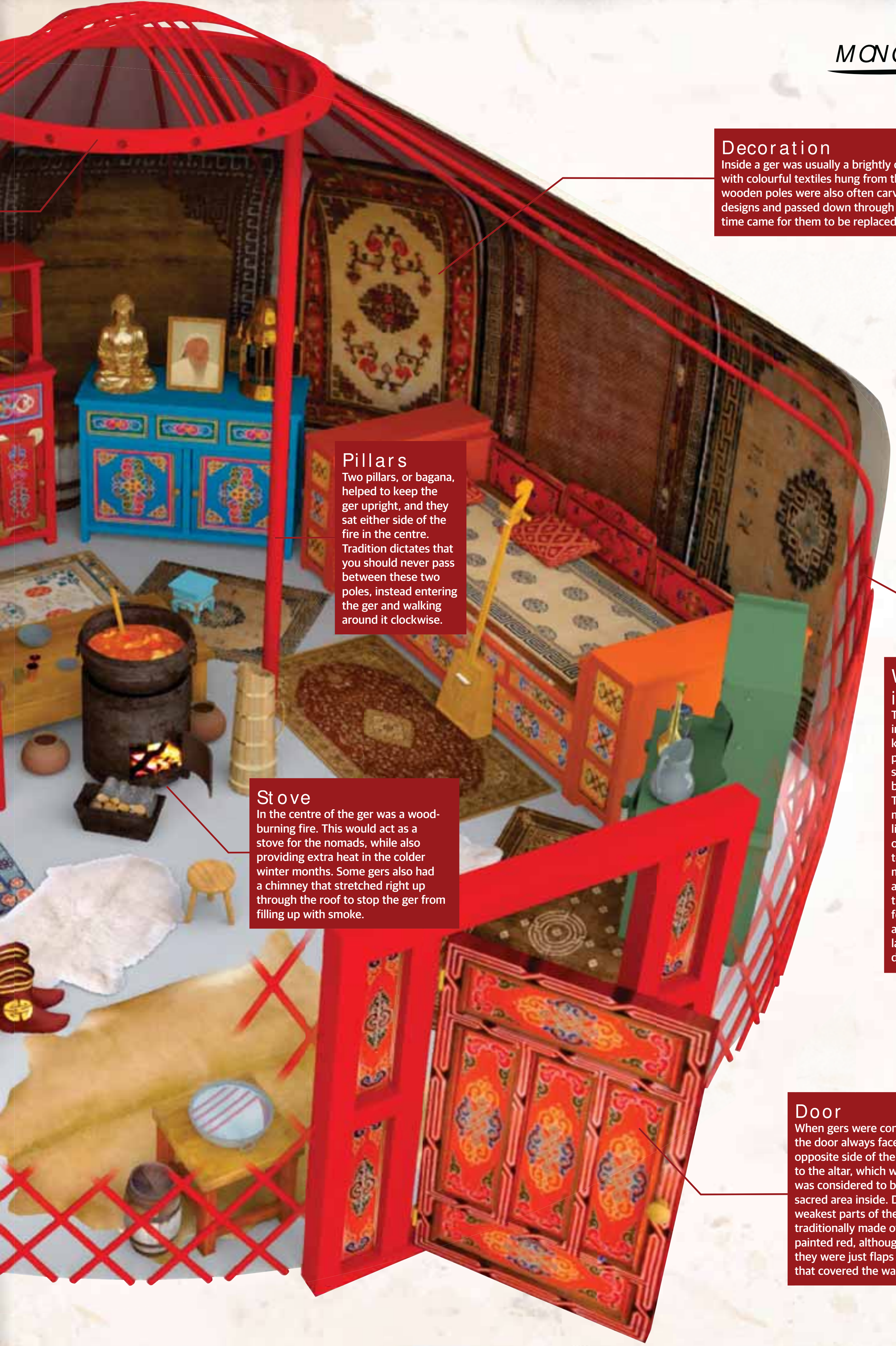


Domed roof
The domed roof meant that the wind couldn't lift it away, but it was also the most complex part of the ger. It is here that the roof poles, or uni, attach in a ring, leaving a small opening at the top that allows smoke from the fire to leave the ger while allowing fresh air to circulate. This would be covered in bad weather to stop rain from coming into the structure.

Circular shape
Gers are always circular, and there are a few reasons for this, the foremost of which is that this shape allowed them to be heated and cooled quickly and efficiently. The lack of corners also meant that the structure was easier to build and, in the Mongols' view, that there was no bad energy lurking around inside.

Family affair
Constructing and deconstructing gers was, and still is, a family affair. Both men and women would pitch in, with younger children watching and learning from their elders. Larger gers that held bigger families could be taken down in an hour before being hauled across the Mongolian Steppe by pack animals like horses, camels and yaks.

Floors
In traditional gers, the floor, or shal, was often left bare. However, those with more money sometimes laid down felt, wool or hand-sewn carpets to provide more warmth and a more homely feel. Royal tents belonging to the khans also sported Persian rugs alongside other textiles from Iran, China and elsewhere in Central Asia.



Decoration

Inside a ger was usually a brightly coloured place, with colourful textiles hung from the walls. The wooden poles were also often carved with intricate designs and passed down through a family until the time came for them to be replaced.

Pillars

Two pillars, or bagana, helped to keep the ger upright, and they sat either side of the fire in the centre. Tradition dictates that you should never pass between these two poles, instead entering the ger and walking around it clockwise.

Walls and insulation

The walls were divided into individual sections called khana, which were wooden poles made into a lattice shape so that the ger could be deconstructed easily. These lattices were usually made from light woods like willow, birch, poplar or bamboo and attached to each other using ropes made from leather or animal hair. These were then covered in three or four layers of animal hides and felt before the final layer of white canvas was draped over the top.

Stove

In the centre of the ger was a wood-burning fire. This would act as a stove for the nomads, while also providing extra heat in the colder winter months. Some gers also had a chimney that stretched right up through the roof to stop the ger from filling up with smoke.

Door

When gers were constructed, the door always faced south, the opposite side of the structure to the altar, which was in what was considered to be the most sacred area inside. Doors were the weakest parts of the gers and were traditionally made of wood and painted red, although sometimes they were just flaps in the hides that covered the walls.

Illustration: © Adrian Mann

Feeding an ARMY

WITH ONLY MEAT AND MILK AVAILABLE, 'VEGETARIAN' WASN'T EXACTLY IN THE MONGOLS' DICTIONARY

Written by Katharine Marsh

Thanks to constantly being on the move and the harsh steppe climate, the nomadic Mongols took packed lunches to a whole new level. Crops were a no-go; instead, the Mongols relied on animals like sheep, goats, cattle and horses for meat and milk, their two staples, and no part of the animal was wasted.

A meagre amount of foodstuffs were also gathered - wild onions, garlic, tubers, seeds, berries - but they weren't relied on. Dairy was the food of choice in the summer months, with milk being made into yogurt or fermented into airag, while the consumption of meat was generally reserved for winter when the protein and fats were needed more.

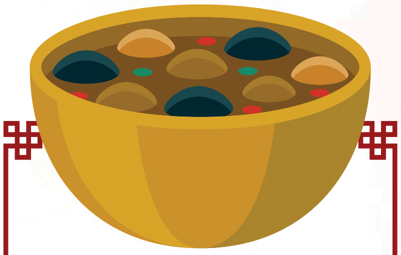
Over time, however, outside influences found their way into Mongol cuisine, with more herbs and spices being added to once-bland stews and soups. Nonetheless, some problems persisted - a lack of ovens for one. Meat was skewered and roasted over an open fire or boiled. After all, simplicity was key for a people that never stayed still for too long.

Steak on the go

Before heading off, a Mongol warrior was sometimes handed a bag filled with raw ground meat by his wife, and the cooking method was ingenious. Placing it between his saddle and his horse, the friction between the two would cook and flatten the steak as the warrior rode, creating a stew. This lives on today as steak tartare.

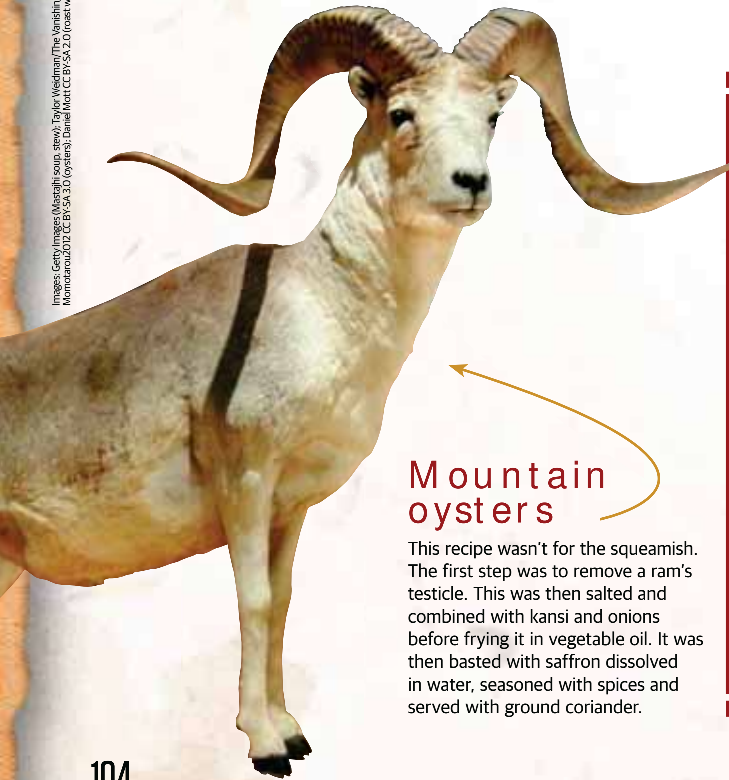
Airag

A slightly fizzy and mildly alcoholic drink, airag was made by pouring milk into bags made from horse hide. These would then be hung in a gur and the milk was churned using a wooden paddle. After several hours, the drink was ready. It is still drunk today, but it's usually called kumiss.



Mastajhi soup

An example of the Islamic influence on Mongol cuisine, a leg of mutton, cardamom, cinnamon and chickpeas were all boiled together to make a soup before straining. Cooked chickpeas and rice were then added alongside the mutton, and the dish was garnished with coriander.



Mountain oysters

This recipe wasn't for the squeamish. The first step was to remove a ram's testicle. This was then salted and combined with kansi and onions before frying it in vegetable oil. It was then basted with saffron dissolved in water, seasoned with spices and served with ground coriander.

Roast wolf soup

To make this delicacy, a cut-up wolf's leg, cardamom, black pepper, long pepper, grain of paradise, turmeric and saffron were mixed together. The soup would then have been seasoned with onions, salt and vinegar.

Mongol curd

Dairy was a Mongol staple, and it was used in a variety of ways. Sometimes milk from cattle, yaks or camels was left to curdle, and then the solids were pressed into a cake between two wooden boards that were weighted down with stones.

Images: Getty Images (Mastajhi soup, stew); Taylor Weidman/The Vanishing Cultures Project CC BY-SA 3.0 (airag, curd); Momotarou2012 CC BY-SA 3.0 (oysters); Daniel Mott CC BY-SA 2.0 (roast wolf soup)

How to make…
MONGOLIAN PANCAKES

ASIA, 13TH CENTURY

Ingredients

- 2 carrots
- 1 stick of celery
- 2 spring onions
- 200g (7oz) of bean sprouts
- 1 tbsp butter
- 2 cups of heavy cream
- Vegetable stock
- 1 pinch of saffron
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup of water
- 1 cup of flour

The medieval Mongolian diet was traditionally based around large quantities of meat, often fried in warriors' upturned shields. However, Kublai Khan - the fifth great leader of the Mongol Empire and grandson of Genghis - had a penchant for Chinese culture; along with his study of Buddhism, he also had a fondness for vegetable pancakes in saffron sauce.

METHOD

We don't know the exact details of Kublai's meat-free snacking, but he supposedly filled his pancakes with finely chopped vegetables and smothered them in a creamy saffron sauce. While it's possible he also ate these vegetables raw, we are, of course, free to diverge from and improvise this most unconventional of Mongolian dishes.

01 Prepare your carrots and celery by first washing them. Then, using a sharp knife, slice them into very thin, short strips (i.e. julienne). You can now either place them to one side ready for frying later or follow Kublai's example and leave them to be eaten raw. At this stage you can also finely chop your spring onions in preparation for the saffron sauce. The bean sprouts don't require any special preparation.

02 To make the sauce, start by melting a knob of butter with a splash of oil in a medium-sized saucepan. Add in the chopped spring onions now and leave to soften for two minutes.

03 Add the heavy cream, vegetable stock and saffron, then bring it just to the boil. You can now leave this to simmer on a low heat for around 12 minutes, seasoning it to your taste.

04 Once the sauce has reduced enough, finely sieve it into a saucepan and leave on a low heat until you're ready for it to be added to the pancakes.

05 To make the pancakes, first whisk together the eggs, water and flour, leaving no lumps. Prepare a medium-sized frying pan with a generous amount of cooking spray, or vegetable oil, and set to a medium heat.

06 Pour a small amount of the batter into the pan, tilting it to form a thin, circular disc. When one side is cooked, turn the pancake and cook until ready. Repeat until you have used up the batter.

07 Next, heat a frying pan, or ideally a wok, until it's very hot. Add a tablespoon of vegetable oil (while being careful of spitting) and add in some bean sprouts and a portion of your vegetables (not the entire batch). Stir the vegetables constantly, turning them over the hottest part of the pan until they're cooked through.

08 Finally, fold up your fried vegetables in your prepared pancakes and serve with a generous lashing of the saffron sauce. There you have it – a medieval Mongolian delicacy fit for a khan ready to serve up to your banqueting table.

118

126

112

108

REBELLION & RESURGENCE

108 DIVISION OF THE EMPIRE

The death of Möngke Khan plunged the empire into a civil war that saw it torn apart

112 THE RED TURBAN REBELLION

Inside the Buddhist sect who dared to resist and overthrew a Mongol dynasty

118 TAMERLANE

Inspired by the Mongol greats of old, a brutal commander cut a bloody path to his own dominion

126 LEGACY OF THE EMPIRE

The Mongols left more behind than just bones and broken cities

130 THE EMPIRE BY NUMBERS

Discover the staggering figures behind the empire

Images: Alamy (p126, Aq Saray Palace, Mongol warrior figurine); Severin.stalder CC BY-SA 3.0 (Great Wall of China); Getty Images (Registan Square Samarkand); Yaan CC BY-SA 3.0 (saddle)

DIVIDING the EMPIRE

MÖNGKE KHAN'S DEATH SENT FRACTURES ALL ACROSS HIS EMPIRE, SPLITTING THE LAND INTO FOUR SEPARATE PIECES

Written by Frances White

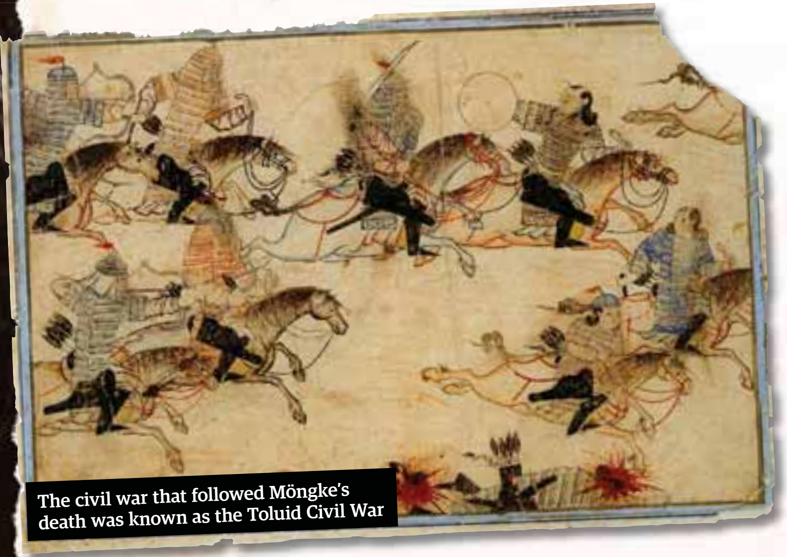
Möngke Khan was a Khagan driven by two dominant forces: plans and ambitions. Möngke began his reign by cutting a bloody path through his enemies, weeding out all opposition and threats. The purge was brutal and grisly, but it left his clan as the most dominant in the Mongol Empire. Once his reign was secured, Möngke set his plans in motion, bringing about administrative reform and providing stability to his nation, helped hugely by a better-regulated tax system. All these reforms ensured that Möngke presided over a calm dominion that could provide the armies he needed for his campaigns across Persia. Möngke's plans led his forces to Syria and China. However, there was one thing the great Khagan did not plan for: dying.

Möngke's unexpected death in 1259 brought his conquests to a screeching halt. To this day the true cause of his demise remains a mystery, with dysentery, cholera, drowning and a rogue arrow all suggested. However, there is one thing we do know about Möngke's death - it split his empire in two.

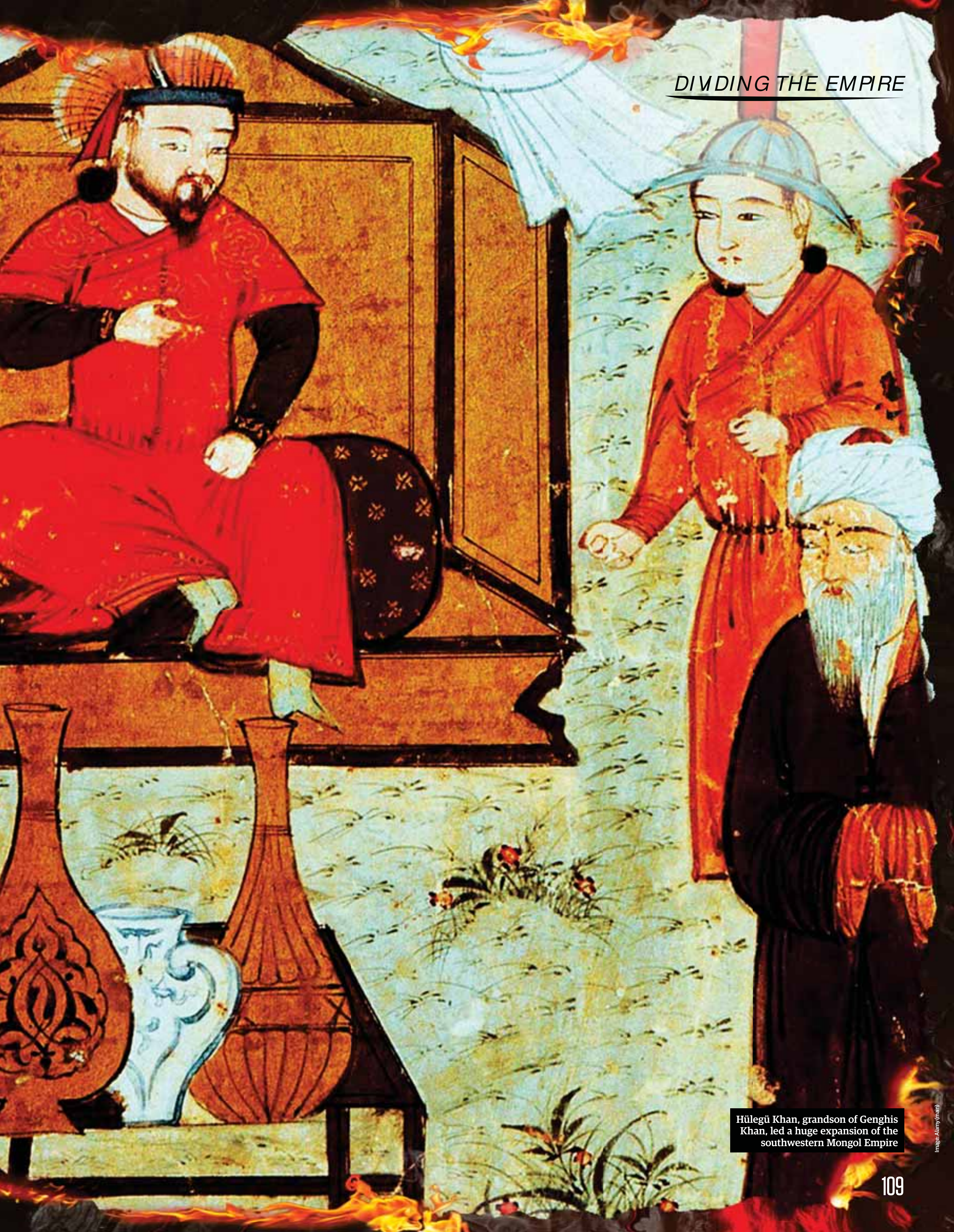
Möngke's two younger brothers, Kublai and Ariq Boke both focused their ambitions on the throne. By all accounts it should have been Kublai's as he was the older of the two. But Ariq was favoured by Möngke and believed his older brother intended for him to replace Möngke as Khan, as Ariq was named regent while Möngke was on campaign.

Ariq, like Möngke, knew the power of strong alliances and worked quickly to secure the support of influential noble families. Kublai, however, had all his brother's military genius and the might to put it into action. Kublai benefited from the huge advantage of having ready supplies from China to feed his troops. These resources proved vital in the four-year-long struggle between the brothers. Steadily, Kublai cut through all of Ariq's allies, and his younger brother's remaining supporters began to desert en-masse. Ariq had no choice but to surrender to his brother, and Kublai was finally declared Great Khan in 1260.

On the surface, the empire looked stronger than ever; Kublai had managed to unite all the noble families beneath him. Even so, when he formally declared himself Great Khan, none of the three other khans attended the Kurultai (military council). Kublai's hold over China and Mongolia was formidable, but in reality the empire was cracking beneath his feet. The civil war had carved great fissures across the empire that even Kublai could not hope to mend, divisions that would see it disintegrate into four pieces.



The civil war that followed Möngke's death was known as the Toluid Civil War



Hülegü Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, led a huge expansion of the southwestern Mongol Empire

Image: Alamy (main)

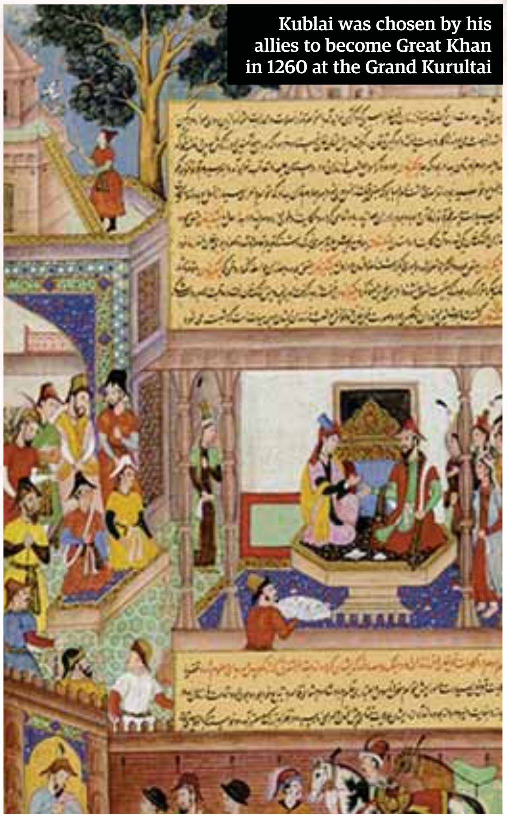
YUAN DYNASTY

For decades the Mongol Empire had reigned over regions of modern China, but Kublai Khan wanted to officially consolidate his rule in the country and become – as all Khan's before had dreamt of – the official emperor of China. This was a huge ask, because a very worthy foe stood in his way in the Song dynasty. The dynasty was overflowing with a force of over a million men and boasted a naval fleet capable of stopping even the might of the Mongol military. Where the Mongols relied on the power of their legendary cavalry, the Song employed strategic tactics and static warfare. Because of the Song's tendency to protect themselves in well-fortified cities, Kublai had to employ a new approach: pick off his enemies one by one and gradually force the survivors into submission.

It took 11 years for this tactic to finally bear fruit, helped in no small way by the infighting among the Chinese royals. The empress dowager surrendered the capital on 28 March 1276, and a great naval battle finally blasted a hole in the last bastion of Song resistance on 19 March 1279. Kublai had done the impossible: he had conquered China and united the country for the first time since the 9th century.

Kublai utilised the government structure used by his predecessors but replaced the Chinese officials with Mongols. Because of this he was accused of abandoning his traditional Mongol origins. He caused further alienation with his kinsmen when he chose to make Dadu (modern-day Beijing) his capital. For Kublai it made sense; he had already lost control of many vital Mongol regions in the west, so a strong and stable base of power in the east was necessary.

Kublai's succession in China was led not only by his great ambition to achieve the impossible, but also a desire to protect his throne from the threats that had emerged during the Civil War and the years of jostling for power that followed.


Kublai was chosen by his allies to become Great Khan in 1260 at the Grand Kurultai

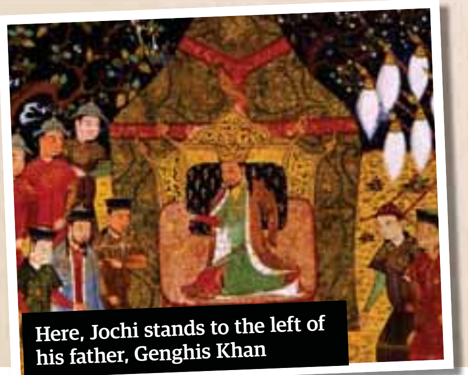
Jochi

FATHER OF THE GOLDEN HORDE

Born the oldest son of the great Genghis Khan, Jochi was an accomplished military leader yet had a kinder disposition than his father (though he still cut a fearsome figure). His more approachable manner made him popular with his contemporaries, and on one occasion he is said to have dared to argue with his father against killing an enemy chief's son on the grounds that the boy was a talented archer and would therefore be more useful alive. Genghis had him killed regardless.

Prior to Genghis' death the empire was split between Jochi and three of his brothers. Ögedei (who was chosen as supreme ruler on account of the fact that Jochi's paternity was never fully established) controlled the bulk of eastern Asia, including China; Chagatai ruled north Iran and Central Asia; and Tolui, due to his status as the youngest sibling, received a small dominion closer to the Mongolian heartlands. For his part, Jochi was placed in charge of what is today Russia. Unfortunately for the eldest brother, he didn't live long enough to rule his domain for long, dying six months before Genghis passed.

Jochi's lands were divided among his descendants, and it was his son Batu who would lead an invasion of Europe. Batu's khanate became known as the Golden Horde, a name perhaps derived from Batu's golden tent and the Mongol word for 'camp' being 'horde'. A mix of Turks and Mongols, it proved to be the most long-lasting khanate.


Here, Jochi stands to the left of his father, Genghis Khan

The very last remnant of the Golden Horde, the Kazakh Khanate, survived until 1847

GOLDEN HORDE

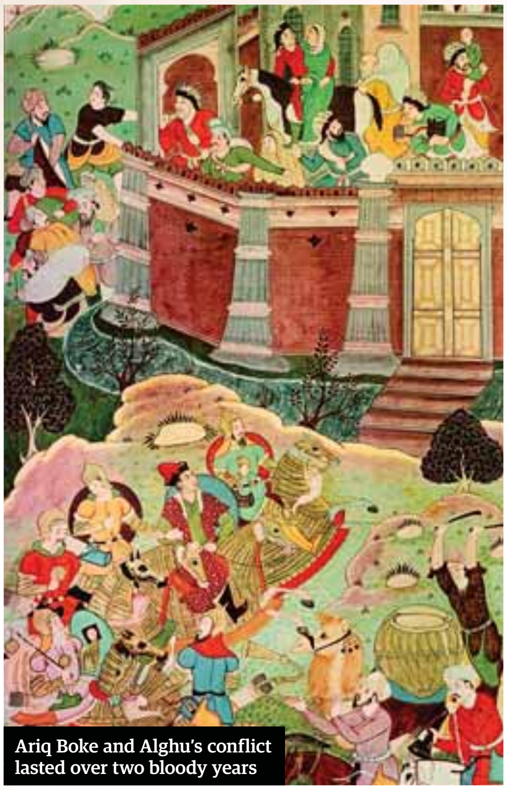
The Golden Horde was mainly based in the northwest of Europe and covered an area that included the Volga region, Ural Mountains, steppes of the Northern Black Sea, Western Siberia, the Aral Sea and some Russian principalities. At the time Kublai was facing his brother in the civil war, the Golden Horde was under the leadership of Berke, Batu's brother and a descendant of Genghis Khan.

The Horde continued its theme of conquest across Europe, striking fear in Poland, Lithuania and Prussia. However, Berke split from tradition when he converted to Islam. This caused a rift between the Golden Horde and Hülegü Khan, leader of the Ilkhanate, who had recently conquered the Muslim nations of Iran and Iraq in brutal fashion. This feud was worsened by the two powers sharing a border and, inevitably, war broke out between them in 1262. The Horde managed to suppress an Ilkhanate invasion, but because of this distraction it was unable to support Ariq in the civil war. When Kublai eventually won, Berke refused to attend the Kurultai.

With such obvious opposition to Kublai, and such a powerful enemy in the Ilkhanate, it is no wonder that the Golden Horde had no desire to unite under a new Great Khan. The wars with the Ilkhanate continued beyond Berke's reign into the tenure of son's, Möngke Temur.

Kublai opposed an invasion of Ilkhanate territories by the Golden Horde and only managed to keep Temur in line with force. However, Temur was not easily manipulated, and under his rule the Golden Horde became virtually independent from Kublai and his capital in Beijing. When war broke out between Kublai and the Ögedeid leader Kaidu, Temur lent his support to the latter.

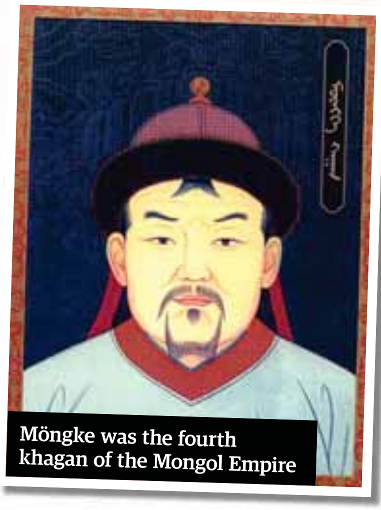
By 1310 the Golden Horde controlled more territory than Alexander the Great's entire empire


Ariq Boke and Alghu's conflict lasted over two bloody years

CHAGATAI KHANATE

The Chagatai Khanate comprised of the lands previously ruled by Chagatai Khan, second son of Genghis Khan. The Chagatai Khanate covered Central Asia, Afghanistan, Zhetysu (today in Kazakhstan) and Kashgaria (in northwest China). Previously, the region had bowed to the power of the Great Khan, but this changed when Kublai took the throne.

At the time of the civil war, the Chagatai, ruled by Queen Orghina, wished to remain neutral, but Ariq Boke, Kublai's brother and rival, instead saw this as an opportunity. He installed Alghu, grandson of Chagatai, on the throne, hoping that the new grateful Khan would provide him with the weapons and resources he desperately needed. Unfortunately for Ariq, Alghu had plans of his own and formally declared that the khanate was independent. To add insult to injury, he then went on to attack Ariq's allies, the Golden Horde, publicly declaring his support for Kublai. On the surface, the Chagatai had thrown in their lot with Kublai, but their independence was not something they had any intention to relinquish to him, Great Khan or not.


Möngke was the fourth khagan of the Mongol Empire

As a region, the Chagatai remained closest to the Mongol's nomadic roots and was steeped in tradition. However, perhaps because of this, it suffered from slow economic growth and was constantly at war with its various neighbours.

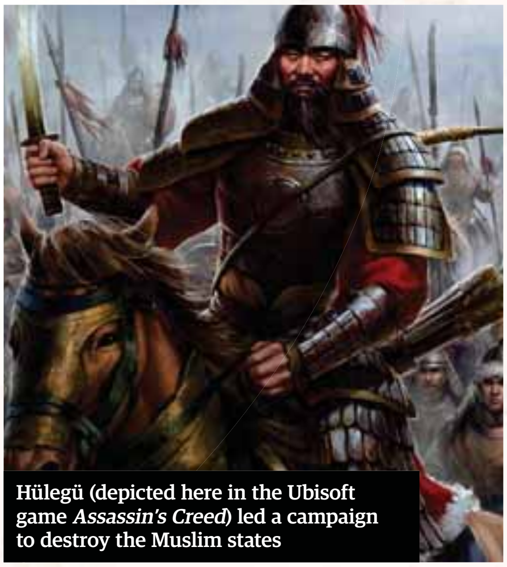
Between 1272 and 1301 it was overthrown, and ultimately the state ended up dividing further into two: Transoxania in the west and Moghulistan in the east.

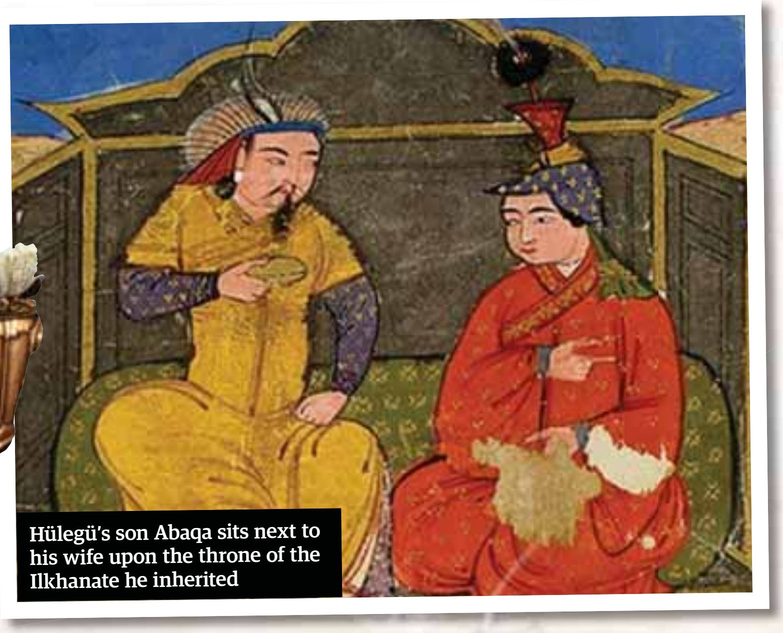
> "Alghu attacked the Golden Horde and declared his support for Kublai"

ILKHANATE

When Möngke Khan passed away, Hülegü Khan, his brother, inherited this middle eastern section of his empire, covering parts of what is now Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Hülegü was a conqueror in every sense of the word, unleashing a brutal campaign across the Abbasid Caliphate and only returning when his brother died. However, he was also excellent at making enemies. Berke, leader of the Golden Horde and known follower of Islam, declared war on him, likely due to his destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate. When Hülegü died a premature death, control of the region passed to his son Abaqa.

Abaqa experienced more success than his father in resisting his battling neighbours, beating back Baraq of the Chagatai and sacking the region's capital. The battles would continue, with the Ilkhanate borders constantly shifting. However, these early victories established the Ilkhanate as a force to be reckoned with. The original concern of the Ilkhanate had been power and conquest, particularly in the Middle East, with a focus on the Islamic states, but with the division of the empire that expansion ground to halt, and the Ilkhanate became preoccupied by internal conflicts.


Hülegü (depicted here in the Ubisoft game *Assassin's Creed*) led a campaign to destroy the Muslim states


Hülegü's son Abaqa sits next to his wife upon the throne of the Ilkhanate he inherited

As the original goal for the Ilkhanate faded from focus, the leaders ironically began converting to Islam. The Ilkhanate never recovered from the constant infighting and lack of unity that had plagued it since the break-up of the empire, and by 1357 its territories fell to the might of the thriving Golden Horde.

Images: Alamy (Golden Horde 1310); Ubisoft (Hülegü)

The Red TURBAN Rebellion

HOW A BUDDHIST SECT LED TO THE OVERTHROW OF CHINA'S MONGOL OVERLORDS AND THE RISE OF THE MING DYNASTY

Written by Edoardo Albert

Floods, famine, pestilence. For the hard-pressed peasants of Yuan China, ruled over by the domineering descendants of the Mongol conquerors who had established themselves as overlords of the land, the series of natural calamities indicated one thing: their Mongol rulers had lost the Mandate of Heaven. With the Mandate of Heaven withdrawn, rebellion became not just possible but legitimate: Heaven itself asked of them to remove their unjust emperor and replace him with a new ruler.

But the Yuan dynasty, descended through Kublai Khan from Genghis Khan himself, was not about to simply shuffle back to Mongolia. There would be 17 years of conflict before a new emperor was able to found a lasting dynasty.

The conditions for this long transition had been laid earlier in the political weakness and infighting of the last Yuan emperors and the range of natural disasters that afflicted China in the 1340s and 1350s. The first phase of natural disasters culminated in the 1344 flood of the Yellow River. The river itself, sometimes called 'China's Sorrow' for the devastation inflicted by its floods, is an essential part of China's wealth, its waters providing irrigation for vast areas of agriculture. But because it carries huge amounts of silt, the river lays down deposits on its river bed wherever the stream runs slowly, raising the underlying level and, roughly every 100 years, causing the Yellow River to break through the levees and seek a new path to the sea. But the flatness of the North China Plain, while ideal for agriculture, means that these new channels can be hundreds of kilometres apart: in historical times, the Yellow River has flowed into the sea both north and south of the Shandong Peninsula. The 1344 flood moved the river's mouth to south of the peninsula, where it remained until the middle of the 19th century.

The response of the Yuan regime to the flood of 1344 caused them as much political damage as the flood itself. To try to prevent future floods, the emperor forced huge teams of Han Chinese peasants to raise new embankments. But this forced labour, rather than securing the regime against future floods, served simply to push more people into following the various rebel groups that were springing up around China. Of these, the most important and the most successful was the White Lotus Society.

Originally a Buddhist sect, the White Lotus adapted to persecution by the Yuan dynasty by broadening both its religious base - bringing elements of Daoism, Manichaeism and folk religion into its belief system - and its social base, opening out membership and, crucially, leadership to secular Chinese. As such, it became a focus of resistance against the corrupt rule of the Yuan.

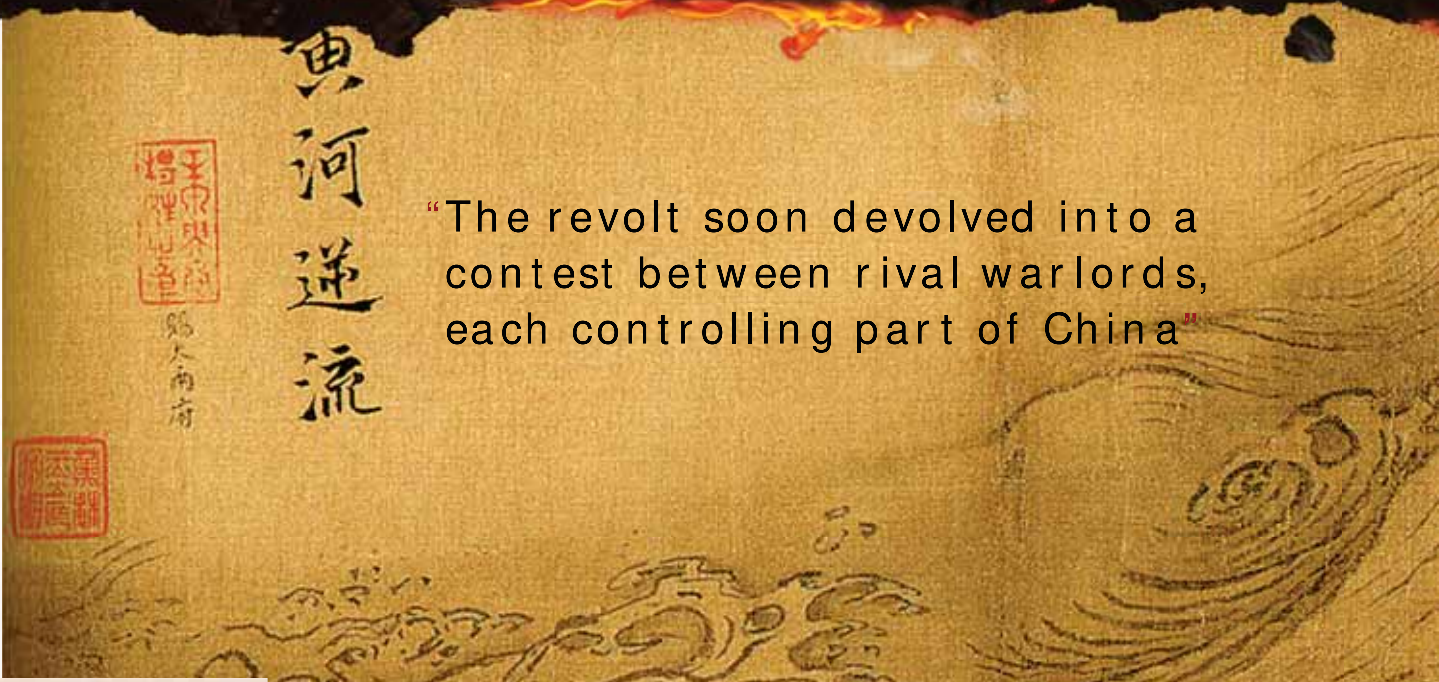
The White Lotus planned to begin an open rebellion in 1351, but the putative leader of the rebellion, Han Shantong, was betrayed and executed by the Yuan. However, the White Lotus united around his son, Han Lin'er, proclaiming him the legitimate heir to the Song dynasty that the Mongols had overthrown under the title 'Little Prince of Radiance'. Contemporary records have been either lost or suppressed, so not much is known about Han Lin'er, but what is clear is that one of his generals, Zhu Yuanzhang, quickly became an important part of the movement supporting the 'Little Prince of Radiance', his ability outweighing his humble birth.

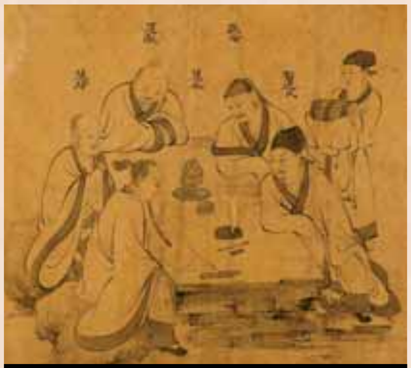
While the response of the Yuan to these mounting threats was hampered by political

The Great Wall was largely built during the time of the Ming dynasty, which took control of China following the rebellion

Images: Getty Images

“The revolt soon devolved into a contest between rival warlords, each controlling part of China”





A Ming-era depiction of the White Lotus Society meeting to prepare for the arrival of the Maitreya, the Buddha who will put the world to rights

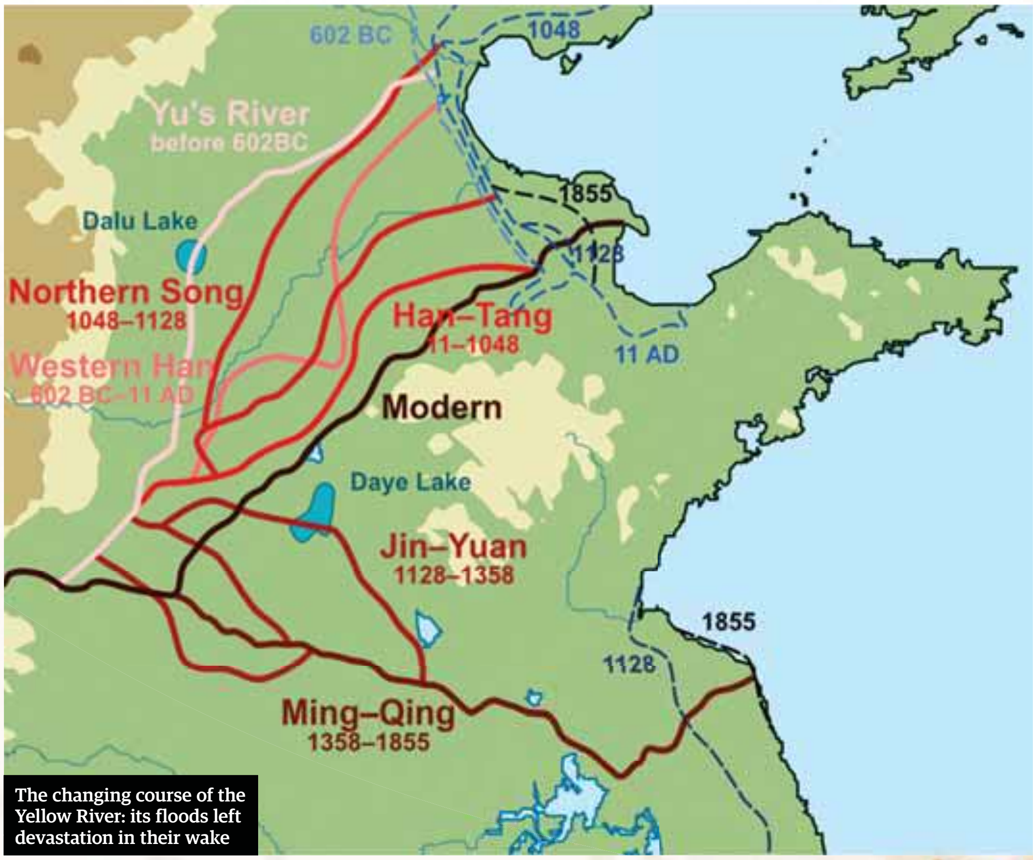
The White Lotus

THE BUDDHIST SECRET SOCIETY THAT OVERTHREW THE MONGOL EMPIRE

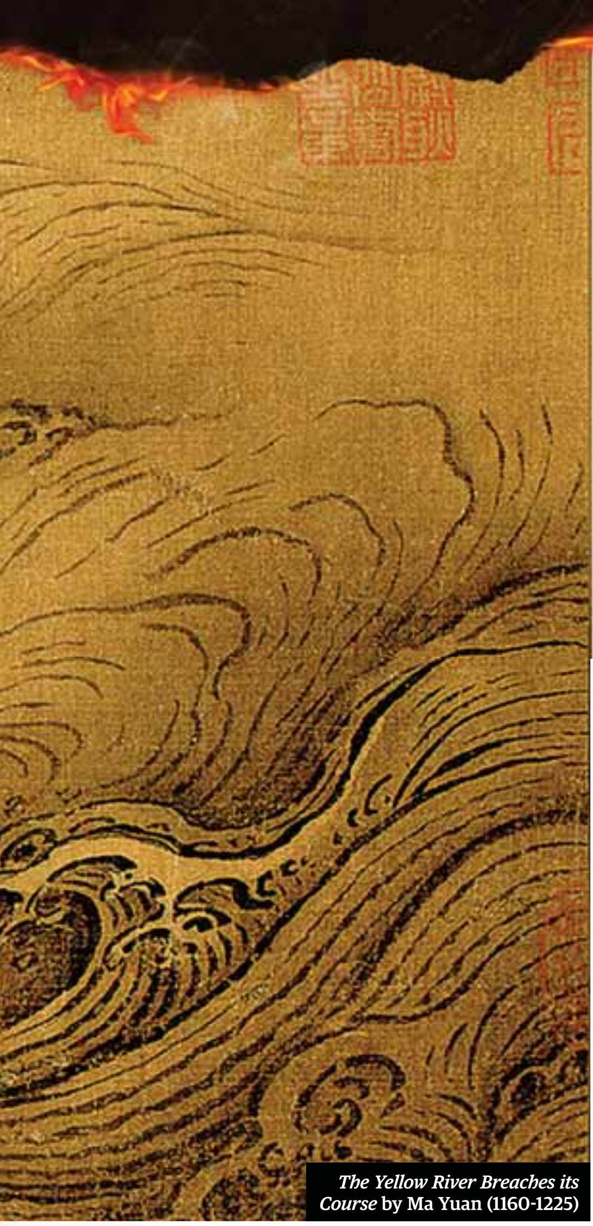
Buddhist sects had provided the focus for opposition to the later Yuan dynasty but, since most were limited to professed monks, the regime had managed to suppress them. The White Lotus Society was different. Its doctrine, that the Maitreya, the Buddha Who is to Come, would arrive and overthrow the Yuan dynasty, gave it huge eschatological appeal. With the Maitreya's arrival, the order of life would be restored following its decay under the Mongols who had dominated China for the last century.

Just as important as the coming of this divine figure was the social innovation that allowed the White Lotus Society to accept secular leaders alongside religious ones. With its spread into wider society – the Society even allowed women to join its ranks – the White Lotus became a major force against the loyalists of the Yuan dynasty.

The White Lotus broadened its popular appeal further by incorporating aspects of Daoism, Manichaeism and Chinese folk religion into its stew of beliefs, making itself a belief system that could accommodate almost anyone among the Han Chinese. It was from the White Lotus Society that the Red Turbans emerged.


602 BC
1048
Yu's River
before 602BC
Dalu Lake
1855
1128
Northern Song
1048–1128
Han–Tang
11–1048
11 AD
Western Han
602 BC–11 AD
Modern
Daye Lake
Jin–Yuan
1128–1358
1855
1128
Ming–Qing
1358–1855

The changing course of the Yellow River: its floods left devastation in their wake



The Yellow River Breaches its Course by Ma Yuan (1160-1225)

infighting and rivalry, the same was true of the rebels. About the only thing that united them initially was their headwear: red turbans, to distinguish themselves from forces loyal to the Yuan dynasty. Thus the revolt became known as the Red Turban Rebellion.

As with other turbulent periods in Chinese history, the revolt soon devolved into a contest between rival warlords, each controlling part of China's huge area and its resources. The Yuan dynasty had effectively sabotaged its own chances of winning the struggle through the emperor, Toghon Temür, first sacking and then allowing the assassination of his most effective general, Toqto'a. General Toqto'a, who was also a notable historian, was extremely popular among his troops; if he had wanted, they would have followed his standard rather than that of the emperor's. But Toqto'a accepted his sacking rather than rebel. However, many of his soldiers, disgusted by the treatment of their beloved general, deserted to the various rebel forces rather than continuing to fight for the emperor. Toghon Temür himself seemed to lose interest in the struggle, nominating his son to reign after him but doing little to quell the disintegration of his regime.

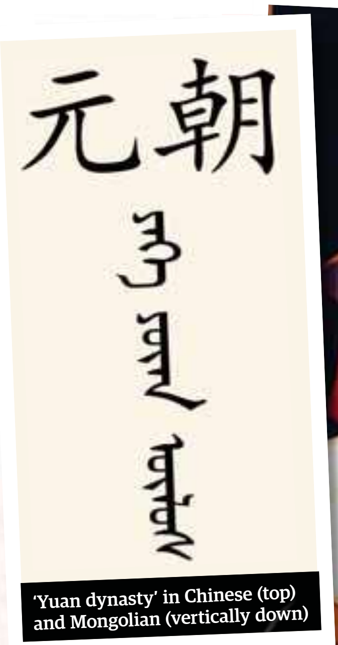
Meanwhile, Red Turban warlords were establishing their own fiefs over various parts of China and jockeying for the necessary position and power that would enable the final blow against the Yuan while still keeping an eye open for the strike in the back by a rival warlord.

As the power of the Yuan waned, the Red Turban warlords gradually realised that the Yuan emperor could be put to one side while they decided among themselves who would finally remove him and become emperor in his place. In this messy conflict, with up to a dozen or so warlords in competition, there were nevertheless only a small number who ever looked capable of seizing power. The first two serious contenders were Zhang Shicheng (1321-1367) and Fang Guozhen (1319-1374), both of whose careers had started with smuggling and piracy.

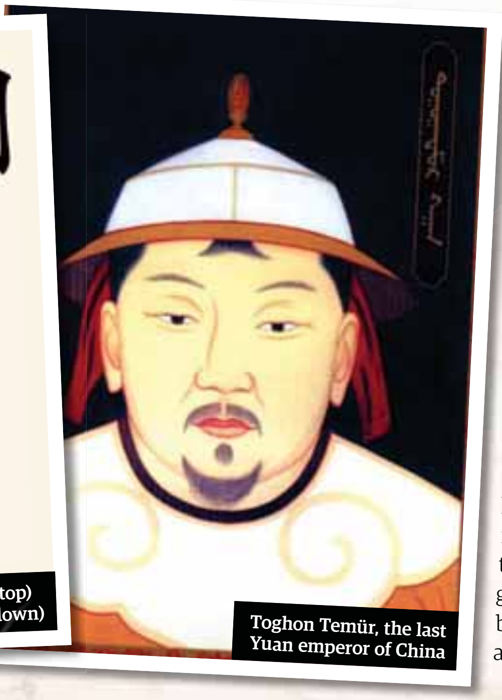
Fang Guozhen, a pirate whose main business income was salt smuggling (a very profitable enterprise when salt was the only effective food preservative and the government taxed it), established his superiority at sea, but he proved unable to effectively govern the coastal strip that he controlled.

For his part, Zhang Shicheng gained control of some of the richest and most- populated parts of China, from the coast south of the Shandong Peninsula and covering a wide swathe of the rich agricultural plain inland from the coast. However, according to later historians, having gained mastery of these rich lands Zhang and his entourage decided to indulge themselves on the fruit of their spoils rather than attempt to govern effectively or move against rivals. Effective administration in China depended on an educated class of professional bureaucrats: without their support, it was all but impossible to run an effective administration.

For a while, Chen Youliang (1320-1363) looked the warlord most likely to consolidate control over the rival leaders and oust the Yuan. Playing for an opportunity, he would ally himself with other rebel factions only to betray them. A skilled but brutal general, Chen Youliang built up a strong army and brought



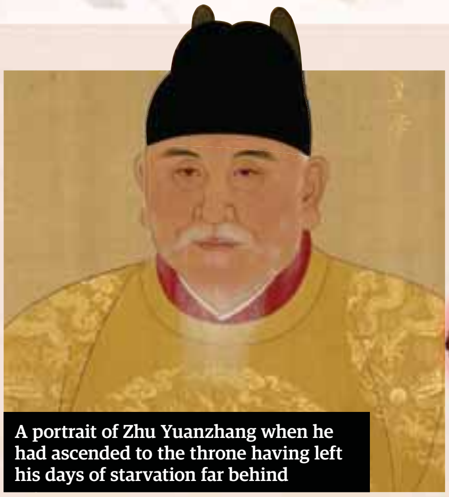
'Yuan dynasty' in Chinese (top) and Mongolian (vertically down)



Toghon Temür, the last Yuan emperor of China

The life of Zhu Yuanzhang

THE MAN WHO WENT FROM STARVING ORPHAN TO EMPEROR OF CHINA



A portrait of Zhu Yuanzhang when he had ascended to the throne having left his days of starvation far behind

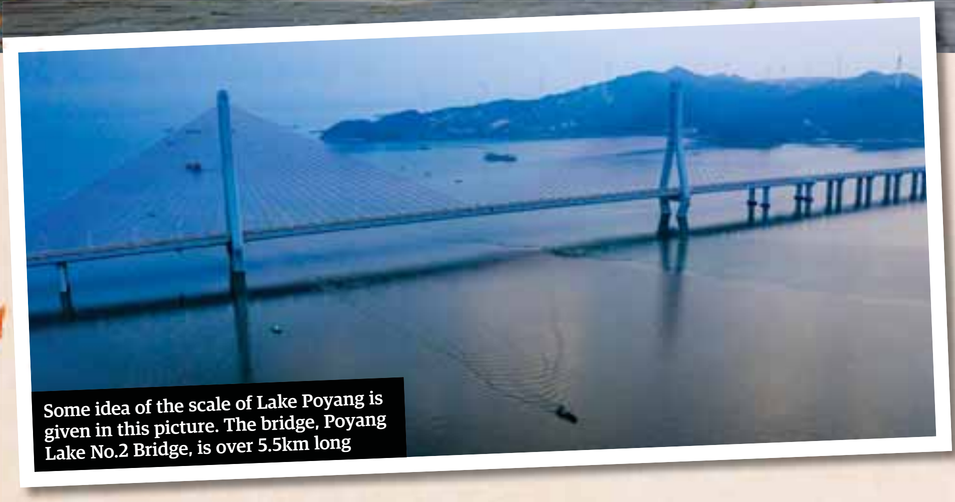
There may have been humbler beginnings for an emperor, but not many. Zhu Yuanzhang was born on 21 October 1328 to a peasant family about 160 kilometres northwest of Nanjing. His parents were so poor that they had to give away some of Zhu's older brothers and sisters since they could not feed them. Despite this, the family still fell victim to the famine in 1344 that resulted from the flooding of the Yellow River: all died save Zhu himself, by then 16 years old and now an orphan.

In a China riven by flood, famine and conflict, the prospects for a 16-year-old orphan were poor. To avoid starvation, Zhu took refuge in a local Buddhist monastery as a novice monk. But the monastery, desperately poor itself, could not afford to support him, and soon Zhu found himself on the road, eking out the most meagre of existences as a wandering beggar. Having survived three years like this, Zhu returned to the monastery, learning to read and write.

In 1353, he joined a rebel Red Turban force led by Guo Zixing, rapidly rising to second in command and marrying Guo's daughter. When Guo Zixing died in 1355, Zhu took over command and, a year later, seized control of Nanjing, making it the power base from which he gradually conquered the country.

Images: Stevenliuyi /derivative work by Esiymbro CC BY-SA 4.0 (yellow river map)

The Ming Xiaoling Mausoleum, final resting place of the Hongwu emperor



Some idea of the scale of Lake Poyang is given in this picture. The bridge, Poyang Lake No.2 Bridge, is over 5.5km long

more and more territory under his control until, in 1360, he felt strong enough to declare himself emperor of nothing less than a revival of the Han dynasty that had ruled from 202 BCE to 220 CE.

Such a claim betokened a breathtaking ambition, but Chen Youliang relied almost entirely upon military might to back up his vaulting claims for himself. These claims came to a catastrophic end at the Battle of Poyang Lake in 1363. While Chinese history is generally taken to be a record of land battles, with little naval history to speak of, this leaves out the pivotal encounter on the waters of Lake Poyang, China's largest lake. The battle is also reckoned the largest in naval history in terms of the number of men who took part, with some estimates suggesting as many as 850,000 sailors, soldiers and marines were involved in the brutal four-day struggle.

The battle pitted Chen Youliang's supporters against Zhu Yuanzhang's men. The latter had come a long way from the days when he was too poor to be pay the pittance required for him to continue within the Buddhist monastery that had been his first recourse against starvation.

Zhu Yuanzhang had taken on military command of the Red Turban faction that had arisen from the White Lotus Society and, following the betrayal and death of its original leader, Han Shantong, he had gradually expanded his power base while continuing to profess loyalty to Han Shantong's son and heir, Han Lin'er. In 1356, Zhu Yuanzhang took control of the city of Nanjing, which became his capital and power base. Unlike the other warlords, Zhu Yuanzhang made it a point of policy to govern

The Battle of Lake Poyang

THE LARGEST NAVAL ENGAGEMENT IN HISTORY WAS A BATTLE LIKE NO OTHER

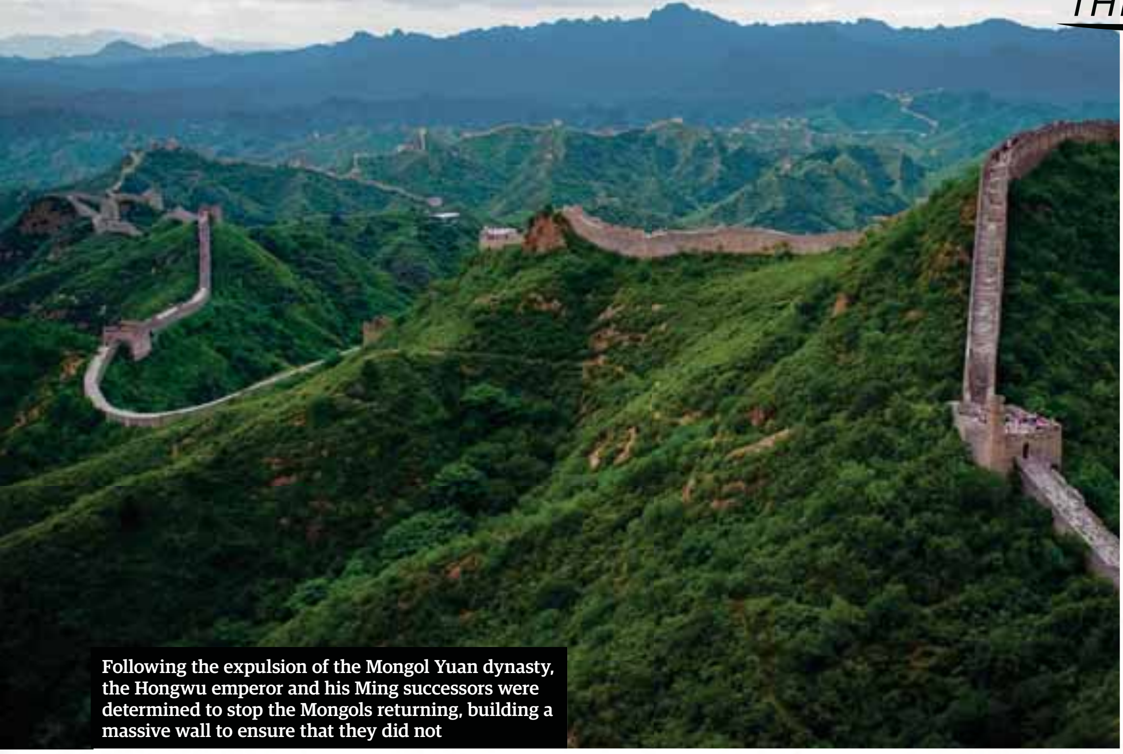
The Battle of Lake Poyang was the largest naval engagement in Chinese history, as well as the biggest naval battle in terms of numbers of men taking part in world history. And it happened on a lake. Albeit, Lake Poyang is a big lake: its size depends on the season, wet or dry, but in this time period it typically covered 3,500 square kilometres.

In 1363, Chen Youliang learned that his rival Zhu Yuanzhang was engaged on the southern borders of his territory. Taking the chance, Chen launched a naval assault on Zhu's fortress city, Nanchang, which was then on the shores of Lake Poyang. To do so, Chen assembled a force of 300,000 men manning an armada of ships, with the largest, tower ships, being armoured assault vessels. However, the defenders of Nanchang held out for two months before a messenger got through the siege to tell Zhu Yuanzhang what was happening.

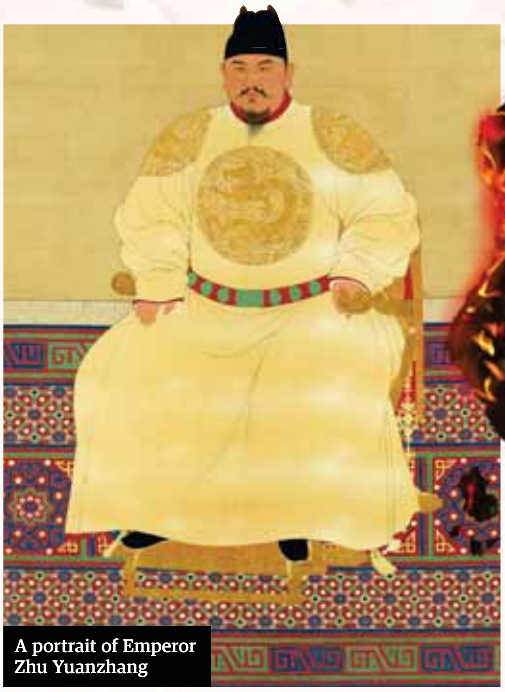
In response, Zhu's fleet of 100,000 men on 1,000 ships advanced into Lake Poyang. Eager for a decisive battle, Chen Youliang ended the siege and sailed his fleet out into the lake. The biggest naval battle in history was about to begin. On 30 August 1363, the fleets met. While Chen's fleet had the advantage in men and ships, the lake's water levels had declined through the dry season: the tower ships, with their deep hulls, could barely move.

The battle lasted four days and, after nearly coming to grief himself on the first day, Zhu realised that the low water levels gave his smaller ships an advantage over Chen's fleet, bunched together in the deep water channels. On the second day, Zhu launched fire ships that, blown by a favourable wind, drifted into the tightly packed vessels of Chen Youliang. More than 100 ships were sunk. The battle was not yet over though, with the third day used by both sides for regrouping. Chen Youliang still had the advantage in men and ships, an advantage that endured after a fourth, inconclusive day of battle. Zhu withdrew his fleet, but Chen Youliang was still contained in the lake with his escape blocked.

A month later, Chen Youliang made his break-out attempt. His fleet fought its way past the land forts blocking the entry into the Yangtze River only to find Zhu waiting for him. The two fleets engaged in desperate battle but the whole affair was decided when an arrow from one of Zhu's archers hit Chen Youliang in the eye, killing him. The battle was over.



Following the expulsion of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the Hongwu emperor and his Ming successors were determined to stop the Mongols returning, building a massive wall to ensure that they did not



A portrait of Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang

his territory well, which had the effect of attracting many incomers to Nanjing, attracted by its stability among the violence and corruption prevalent in the lands controlled by the other warlords. Such was Nanjing's reputation for safety and good government that its population swelled tenfold in the decade following Zhu Yuanzhang's conquest.

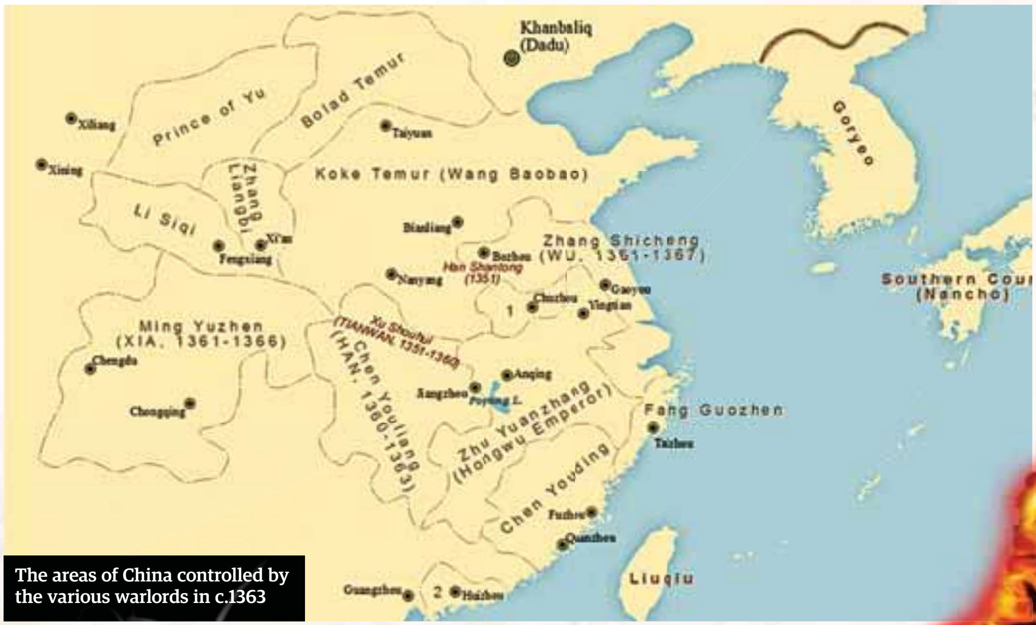
> "Chen Youliang sent his tower ships, vessels that could hold 2,000 troops, to attack Zhu's fortress at Nanching"

With the Yuan making no effort to dislodge the rebels, Zhu Yuanzhang set about forming an administration that could turn him from a warlord into an emperor, although he still publicly proclaimed his allegiance to Han Lin'er as the emperor for a renewed Song dynasty. But by taking the title Duke of Wu, Zhu Yuanzhang began to advance himself up the ladder of nobility towards the throne. With many of the most talented administrators in China coming into his service, Zhu Yuanzhang was slowly assembling a team that would be able to control the country.

However, in order to do so, he had first to remove his dangerous (and more powerful) rival to the east, Chen Youliang. The realisation was mutual, and it was Chen Youliang who precipitated the decisive battle by sending his armoured tower ships, vast vessels that could hold 2,000 troops as well as having separate holds for cavalry and an armoured superstructure, to attack Zhu's fortress at Nanchang. However, the garrison at Nanchang held out and sent a messenger to Zhu, asking for his help lest they fall. The result was the Battle of Poyang Lake, which over four days (30 August–2 September) saw a tactical defeat of Chen Youliang's forces, followed by their rout on 4 October, when Chen Youliang was himself killed by an arrow.

With Chen Youliang out of the way, Zhu Yuanzhang turned his attention to Zhang Shicheng's kingdom, laying siege to its capital, Suzhou, and capturing it in 1367 after ten months of besieging it. With the tide of heaven having swung so clearly in Zhu Yuanzhang's favour, the remaining warlords decided that surrender was the better part of valour and placed themselves under his sovereignty. There was, however, the small matter of Han Lin'er, the putative emperor of a renewed Song dynasty in whose service Zhu Yuanzhang had first risen to prominence. No doubt, Zhu Yuanzhang would have served under Han Lin'er if an unfortunate accident had not befallen the would-be emperor in 1366 or 1367, in which Han Lin'er drowned in a pond. With the titular claimant out of the way, Zhu Yuanzhang accepted the Mandate of Heaven and proclaimed himself emperor on 20 January 1368, taking the name 'Hongwu' ('vastly martial'). As emperor, he founded the Ming dynasty that would rule China until 1644.

With all the rival warlords out of the way, the Hongwu emperor turned his attention to the rump state still under control of the Yuan in the north of China, marching north in 1368. Rather than give battle, the Yuan abandoned their capital (present-day Beijing) and retreated into Mongolia. By 1381, the emperor's forces had brought the entire country under his control. After 89 years of foreign domination the Chinese ruled China again.


Khanbaliq (Dadu)
Prince of Yu
Bolad Temur
Xiliang
Xining
Taiyuan
Zhang Liangbi
Koke Temur (Wang Baobao)
Goryeo
Li Siqi
Xi'an
Fengxiang
Bianliang
Bozhou
Han Shantong (1351)
Zhang Shicheng (WU, 1361-1367)
Nanyang
Gaoyou
Chuzhou
1
Yingtian
Southern Cou
(Nancho)
Ming Yuzhen (XIA, 1361-1366)
Xu Shouhui (TIANWAN, 1351-1360)
Chen Youliang (HAN, 1360-1363)
Chengdu
Anqing
Jiangzhou
Poyang L.
Chongqing
Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu Emperor)
Fang Guozhen
Taizhou
Chen Youding
Fuzhou
Quanzhou
Liuqiu
Guangzhou
2
Huizhou

The areas of China controlled by the various warlords in c.1363

Images: Zhangzhugang CC BY-SA 4.0 (Ming Xiaoling); Getty Images (Lake Poyang); SY CC BY-SA 4.0 (China map); Severin.stalder CC BY-SA 3.0 (Great Wall of China)

Tamerlane's REIGN OF TERROR

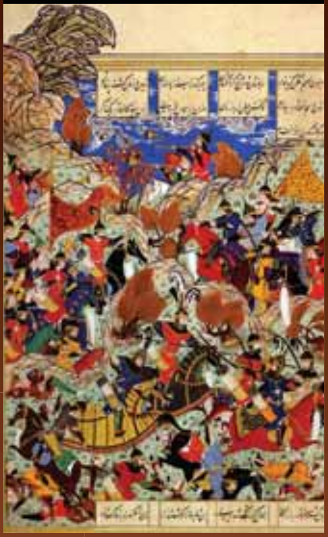
THE SO-CALLED 'SCOURGE OF GOD' BUILT AN EMPIRE THAT LEFT PEOPLE QUAKING FROM DAMASCUS TO DELHI

Written by Alice Barnes-Brown

The bloody reputation of Mongol ruler Tamerlane precedes him. Remembered for his gruesome military campaigns in which tens of millions of people may have been slaughtered, the great warrior Tamerlane - otherwise known as Timur - possessed a vast territory, stretching from Delhi to the Mediterranean. As the most powerful ruler in the 14th-century Islamic world, he was both feared and respected by his contemporaries. However, his legacy in the West mainly comes from obscene caricatures, such as Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, a two-part play in which the savage emperor treats human life with as much respect as he would an ant. But was 'Timur the Lame' merely a simple, brutish warrior?

A century and a half before Timur's birth, Genghis Khan roamed the plains of Central Asia. Famously spending his life laying waste to supposedly mightier states, when Genghis died the Mongol conqueror's vast empire was split between four of his descendants. Chagatai, his second-eldest son, was granted a large tract of land. Becoming known as the Chagatai Khanate, the steppes, deserts and mountains of the region made it one of the most beautiful parts of Genghis Khan's old empire - but it was also one of the most remote.

Timur defeats the Mamluk sultan at the Siege of Damascus in 1400

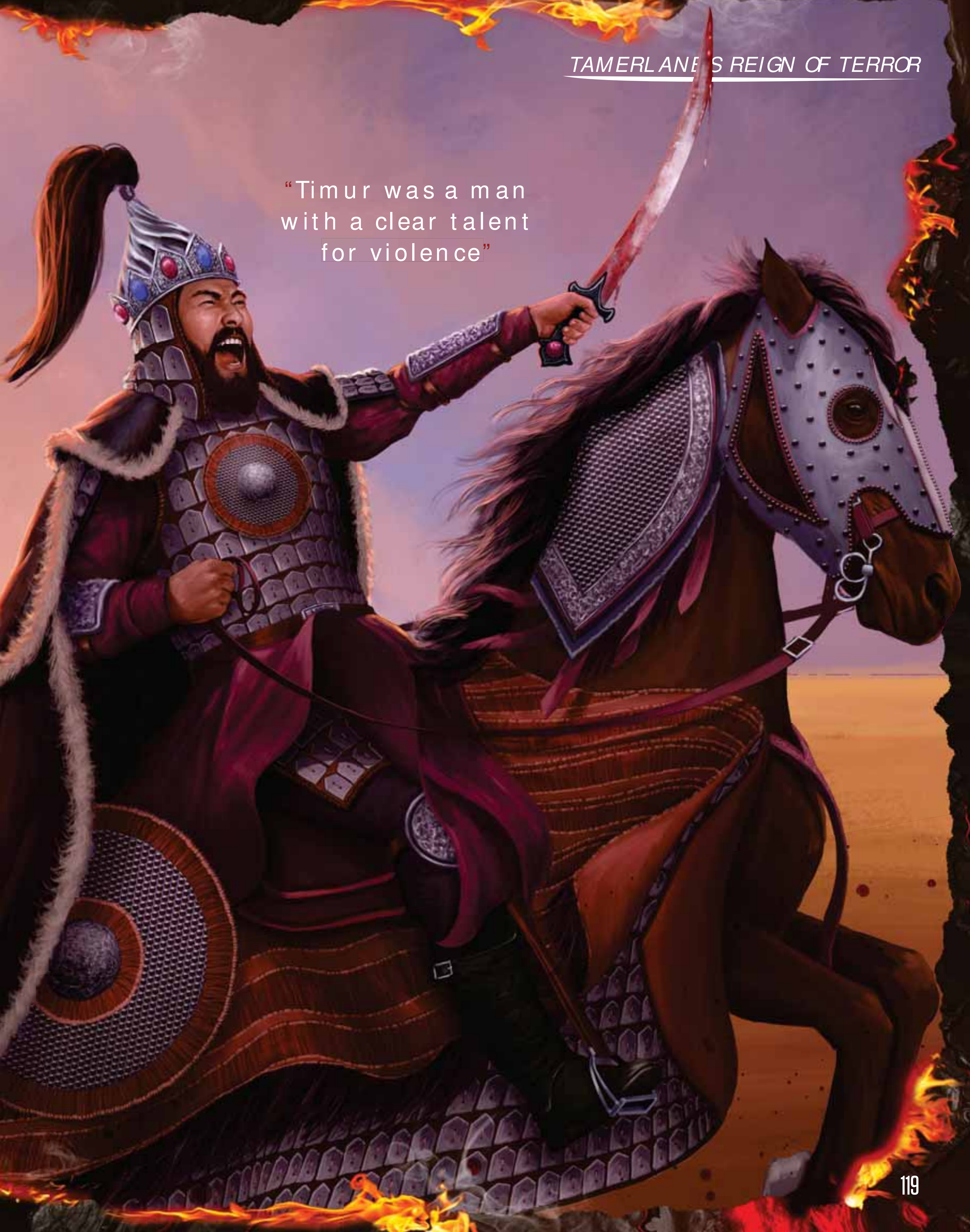


Their neighbours to the north, the Golden Horde, were a formidable force. Ruled by Genghis Khan's grandson, these lawless tribes pillaged towns and villages from Eastern Europe to the Altay Mountains. The Chagatai Khanate, meanwhile, largely subsisted on nomadic herding and was fraught with internal divisions. The khanate quickly split into two parts - the powerful east was called Moghulistan, and the less-fortunate west was known as Transoxiana.

It was in this divided world that Timur was born in 1336. His father Taraqai was a minor nobleman from the Barlas tribe - a group of nomads that made their home in the area south of Samarkand. The young Timur never stayed in one place for all that long, as his clan would repeatedly uproot themselves (and their livestock) to find the best grazing pastures whenever the seasons changed.

Realising that there was profit to be made in illegal activity, Timur turned to petty crime. His first exploits involved rustling sheep from neighbours, and he quickly added banditry to his list of criminal enterprises, making travellers tremble in their boots. A man with a clear talent for violence, Timur apparently worked as a mercenary in his 20s and was once seriously injured by an arrow during a skirmish. Unable to

Image: Kevin McGivern (main illustration)



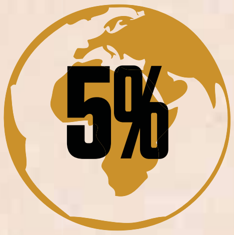
"Timur was a man with a clear talent for violence"

Timur's Brutal Body Count

It's estimated that Timur's armies killed up to

17 million

people – or five per cent of the world's total population – but this is impossible to verify



Timur's domain covered

16 modern day **COUNTRIES**

4,184KM

the empire's width from Ankara to Delhi

It's said Timur had **18 WIVES** and around **25 CONCUBINES**

In Isfahan, he apparently had **70,000** people killed and stacked their heads into a tower

The Timurid Empire lasted just 137 years

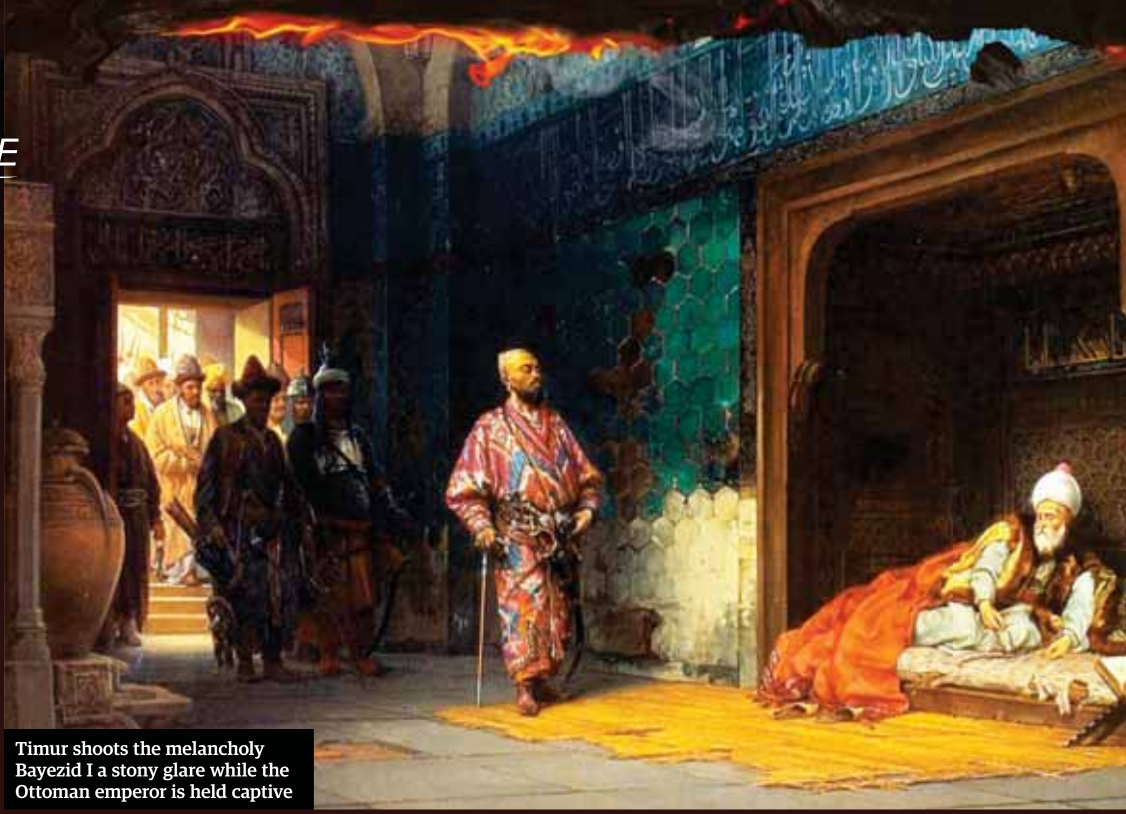
137 YEARS

Timur usurped roughly **27 THRONES**

At the gates of Delhi, Timur allegedly massacred

100,000

Hindu prisoners



Timur shoots the melancholy Bayezid I a stony glare while the Ottoman emperor is held captive

walk properly on his right leg or raise his right arm as a result, this unfortunate incident led to him being christened Timur-i Leng - a Turkic nickname meaning 'Timur the Lame' - which Europeans misinterpreted as 'Tamerlane'.

For some, this injury would mean the end of their crime sprees, but Timur's were only just beginning. His ambitions knew no bounds, and when the ruler of Transoxiana died in 1357, Timur spotted an unmissable opportunity. Aligning himself with the khan of Moghulistan, Transoxiana's arch enemy, the powerful duo installed themselves on the vacant throne of Transoxiana. Ilyas Khoja, the khan's son, was proclaimed king, but Timur was the power behind the crown. However, he wouldn't be content with being second best for long, and in 1364, he switched his loyalties yet again.

This time, Timur rushed to the side of his brother-in-law, Amir Husayn, who had a score to settle with the khan of Moghulistan. By 1366 he and Timur had conquered all of the Transoxiana region. Still, Timur had no desire to share power with anyone and turned on Husayn. In a fight to the death at the city of Balkh, Husayn was assassinated and Timur proclaimed himself the unchallenged ruler.

As he saw it, Timur's mission was to restore Mongol rule to the glory days of Genghis Khan, reigning supreme over lands from Korea to the Caspian Sea. Never one for diplomacy, Timur rushed through a political marriage to Husayn's widow, Saray Mulk Khanum. She was a direct descendant of Genghis Khan on her father's side, and Timur believed that he would be able to use this to make him a more convincing leader in the eyes of the people.

If they weren't completely sold, they'd soon meet a grisly end. Timur wasted no time in showing his enemies who was boss in the most brutal way possible. He spent the first ten years of his rule establishing supremacy over his neighbours, demanding they surrender to him. If they refused, he would destroy their cities and enslave or murder everyone inside.

In 1383, Persia found itself on Timur's hit list. The once mighty empire was weakened by

> "Timur's mission was to restore Mongol rule to the glory days of Genghis Khan"

Timur, seated in resplendent yellow on his throne, orders a military campaign against Georgia

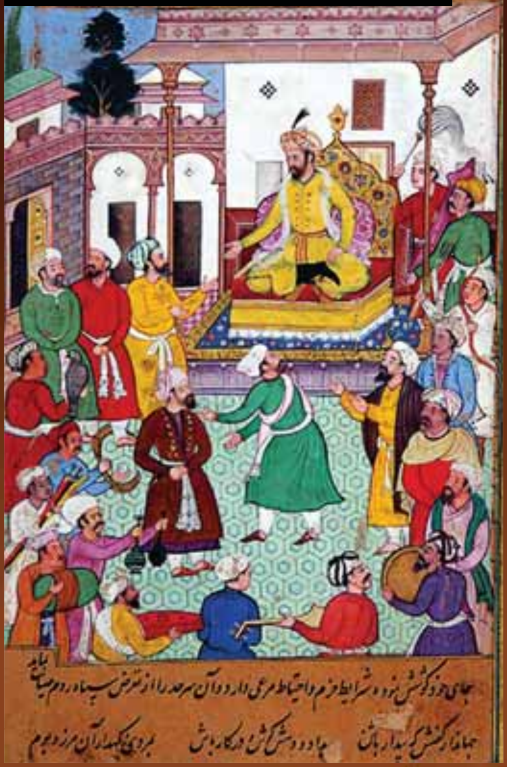


Image: Nicholas Forder (map)

EMPIRE OF BLOOD

IN HIS QUEST TO BE THE NEXT GENGHIS KHAN, TIMUR CONQUERED MUCH OF ASIA

Smyrna **1402**

The port city of Smyrna, defended by the Knights Hospitaller after it was won during the Crusades, was too tempting a target for Timur to resist. In a bold move, the city refused to pay tribute to Timur, so he attacked it with siege engines and blocked the harbour to prevent people from escaping. After killing many Christian refugees and Muslims alike, he burned the city to the ground.

Ankara **1402**

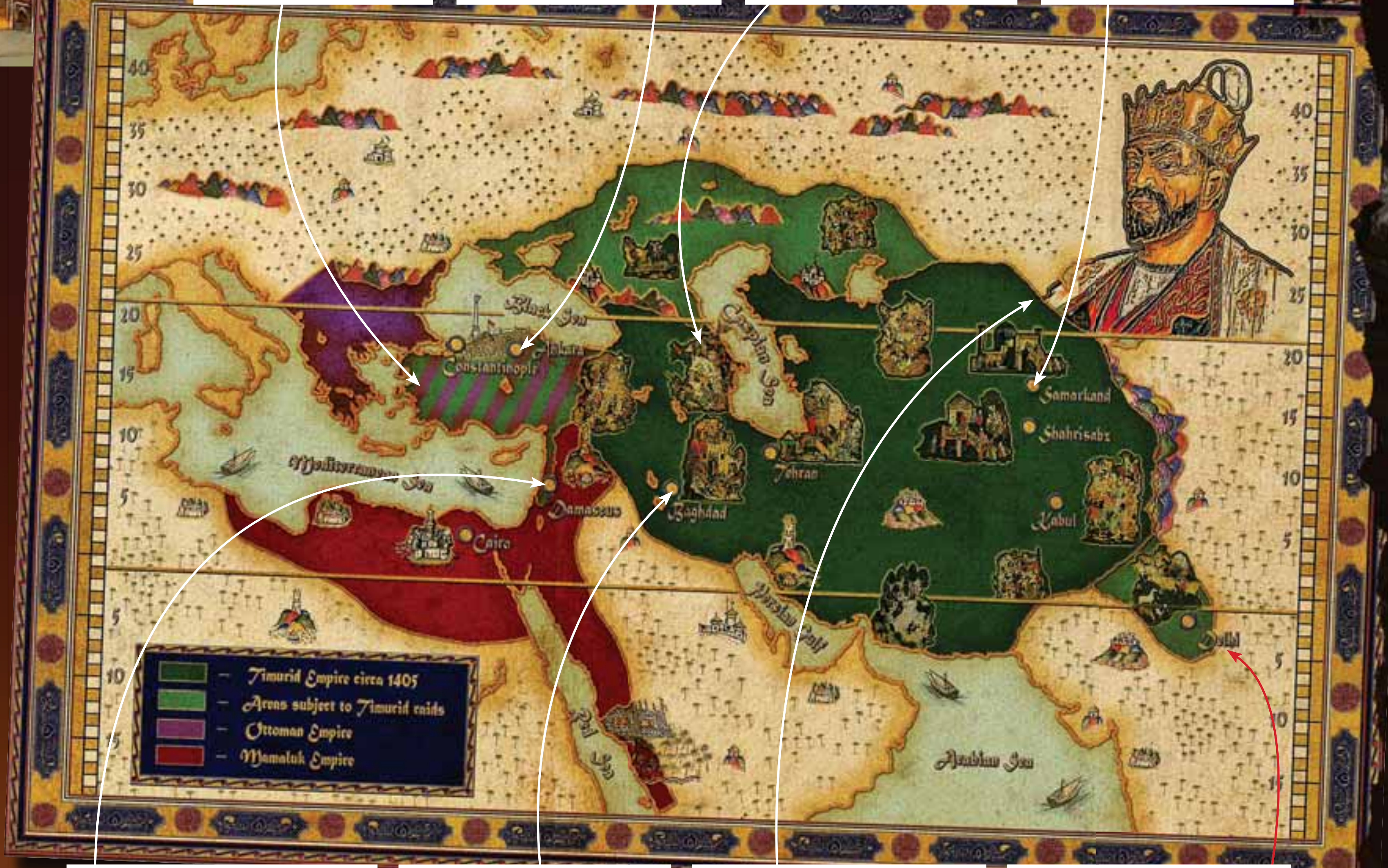
Timur marched to Ankara to meet his adversary Bayezid I deep within Ottoman territory. After leading his army across the desert in the heat of summer, the Ottoman emperor's troops were exhausted. Timur cut off their main source of water, which forced them into a fight. While the Ottoman cavalry from Serbia got off to a strong start, Timur soon annihilated them and took Bayezid back to Samarkand as a spoil of war.

The Caucasus **1385**

At the crossroads of Western Asia and Europe, Azerbaijan and its Christian neighbours Georgia and Armenia became a battleground for many empire-builders. Timur first conquered the Caucasus region in 1385, but it was snatched from him by Tokhtamysh, another Mongol warlord from the Blue Horde (a division of the Golden Horde). On his way to Turkey in 1400, Timur re-established his control over the region with ruthless efficiency.

Samarkand **1370**

Timur, upon defeating the rulers of the Chagatai Khanate and his own brother-in-law, proclaimed himself amir (general) and restorer of Genghis Khan's legacy. Samarkand was to become Timur's regal city, the culture capital of the Islamic world. Dotted with beautiful turquoise and jade mosques, palaces and gardens, Samarkand became the glittering jewel of the desert during Timur's reign.



Damascus **1401**

When citizens of Damascus heard Timur was on his way, they bolted the doors and took to the city walls in an attempt to defend themselves. Incredibly, Damascus held out for a full month before surrendering. Timur allegedly promised them security but once he had gained entry to the city his true nature was revealed. He first extorted a huge ransom from its citizens, then let his men loose to do as they pleased. Only infant children and the elderly were spared death.

Baghdad **1401**

By the time Timur had finished pillaging this once great garden city, there was nothing left but rubble. Tens of thousands of its citizens were slaughtered as vengeance for not surrendering immediately and its key civic buildings were destroyed. The only ones to survive Timur's relentless siege were the artists and craftsmen, who were sent to Samarkand to embellish Timur's grandiose city.

Syr Darya River **1405**

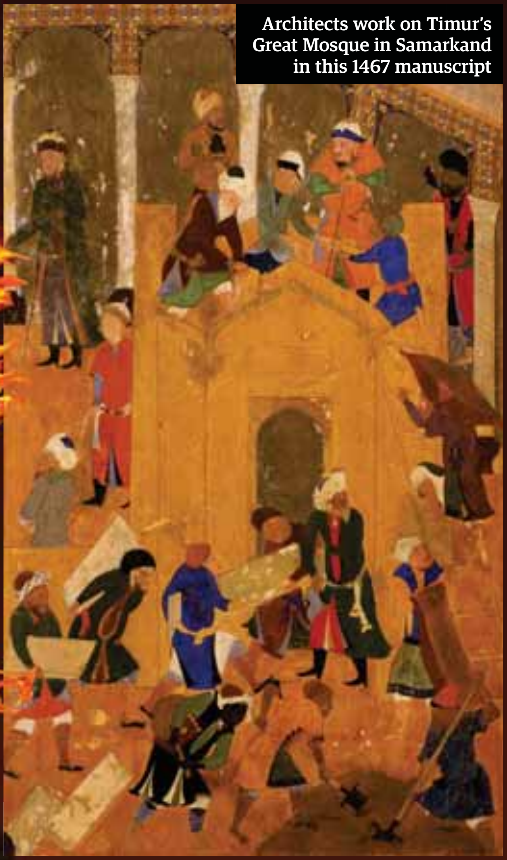
On his way to challenge the Ming dynasty, Timur and his army stopped at the town of Otrar to wait for the bitter cold weather to pass. However, Timur fell ill. His doctors desperately tried to cure him, even by placing him in a bath of ice to bring his fever down. He apparently spoke eloquently to his companions, telling them to pray to Allah to have mercy on him. He died shortly thereafter.

Delhi **1398**

After Timur crossed the Indus River, he headed straight for the terrified Delhi Sultanate. One story goes that Timur understood war elephants were easily scared, so he sent camels with fire on their backs to wildly charge at the great beasts. The elephants ran away and the battle was won. The Mongol conqueror quickly laid siege to the rich city of Delhi, which was left entirely in ruins, making the few survivors of his attack homeless.

internal strife and division, which Timur took full advantage of.

Beginning with the conquest of Herat, he plundered the ancient city of its treasures and destroyed many of its important landmarks. Rumours of such horrific treatment reached other Persian cities, and knowing that Timur would soon reach their walls, they had a decision to make. Some places, like Tehran, surrendered without question and Timur allegedly treated them mercifully. Others would not go down without a fight, so they were annihilated. Isfahan, which rose up against Timur's hefty taxation, witnessed the massacre of its citizens and the building of towers out of their skulls.


Architects work on Timur's Great Mosque in Samarkand in this 1467 manuscript

The only group of people seemingly to escape such horrors were the artisans and craftspeople. Timur didn't spare them out of the kindness of his heart, though. He forcibly deported them to the city of Samarkand so they could get to work building his elaborate vision of an imperial capital. The city was to be the heart of the Islamic world and so Timur filled it with artists, architects and intellectuals from across Asia. Samarkand became a thriving hub of culture in the middle of Central Asia.

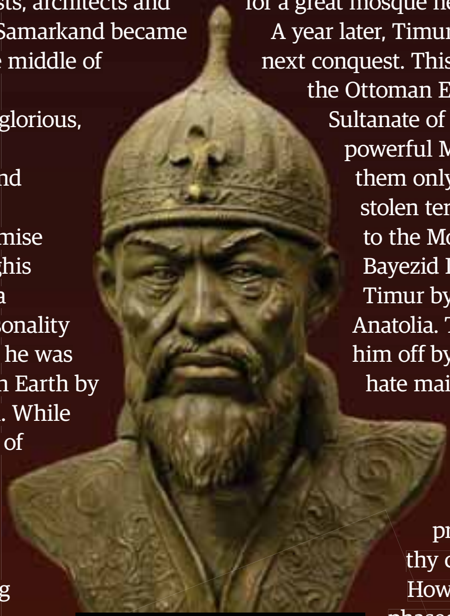
As well as simply being vainglorious, Timur's reasons for building Samarkand as an ode to God and Islamic culture were entirely practical. He was keen to legitimise his rule by both invoking Genghis Khan and stressing his role as a defender of Islam. Timur's personality cult centred on the notion that he was the 'Scourge of Allah', placed on Earth by God to defend the true religion. While he constantly flouted the rules of Islam - namely, that Muslims should not kill - he invoked God often as a means of support for his military campaigns, thereby legitimising them in the people's eyes.

But as the empire expanded, it started to incorporate peoples of different faiths, who thus had to be forced into submission. It was on this pretext that Timur invaded India in 1398. Having kept a watchful eye over the Muslim rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mongol conqueror decided they had become too tolerant of their Hindu subjects and it was time for him to take matters into his own hands.

In September 1398, Timur and his army of approximately 90,000 men crossed over the Indus River. Destroying cities on the way, he quickly defeated the sultan and laid waste to Delhi, which took over a year to lick its wounds. Timur even allegedly captured 90 war elephants from India and used them to haul stone back to Samarkand for a great mosque he was building in his capital.

A year later, Timur was on the hunt for his next conquest. This time, he looked west to the Ottoman Empire and the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt. While both had powerful Muslim rulers, Timur saw them only as usurpers who had stolen territory that rightly belonged to the Mongols. The Ottoman sultan, Bayezid I, for example, had offended Timur by taking Mongol lands in Anatolia. Timur even tried to warn him off by sending him some serious hate mail in 1399. In a letter he wrote, "Thy obedience to the Qur'an, in waging war against the infidels, is the sole consideration that prevents us from destroying thy country".

However, Bayezid wasn't phased. He responded with a cutting remark: "What are the arrows of the flying Tatar against

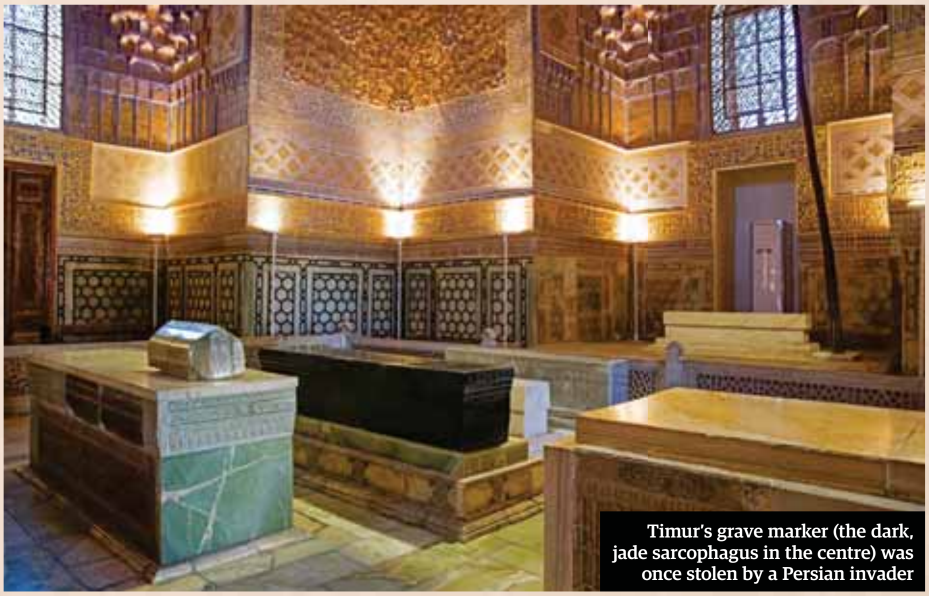

A facial reconstruction of Timur based on measurements of his remains

The Curse of Tamerlane

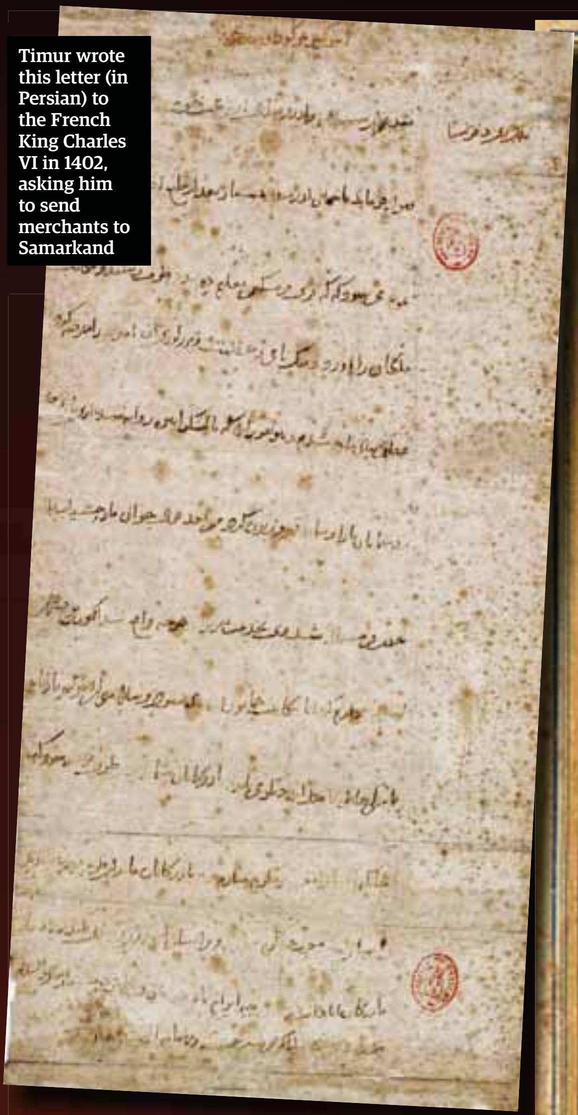
When Timur was buried in 1405, he wanted to ensure that no one would disturb his eternal slumber. Allegedly, he had the words "when I rise, the world shall tremble" and "whomsoever disturbs my tomb shall unleash an invader more terrible than I" inscribed on his tomb, so that potential grave diggers would hopefully get the message and leave him alone.

Unfortunately for Timur, this wasn't actually an effective deterrent. In 1740, a Persian invader named Nadir Shah broke into the Gūr-e-Amir and was so impressed by Timur's magnificent sarcophagus that he risked stealing it. He carried the jade slab back to Persia, but it broke in half in transit. Incidentally, the shah suffered a lengthy run of bad luck thereafter. His son had a very close brush with death, and the shah was advised to return the stone. But the spirit of Timur had apparently not forgiven him – the shah was assassinated a few years later.

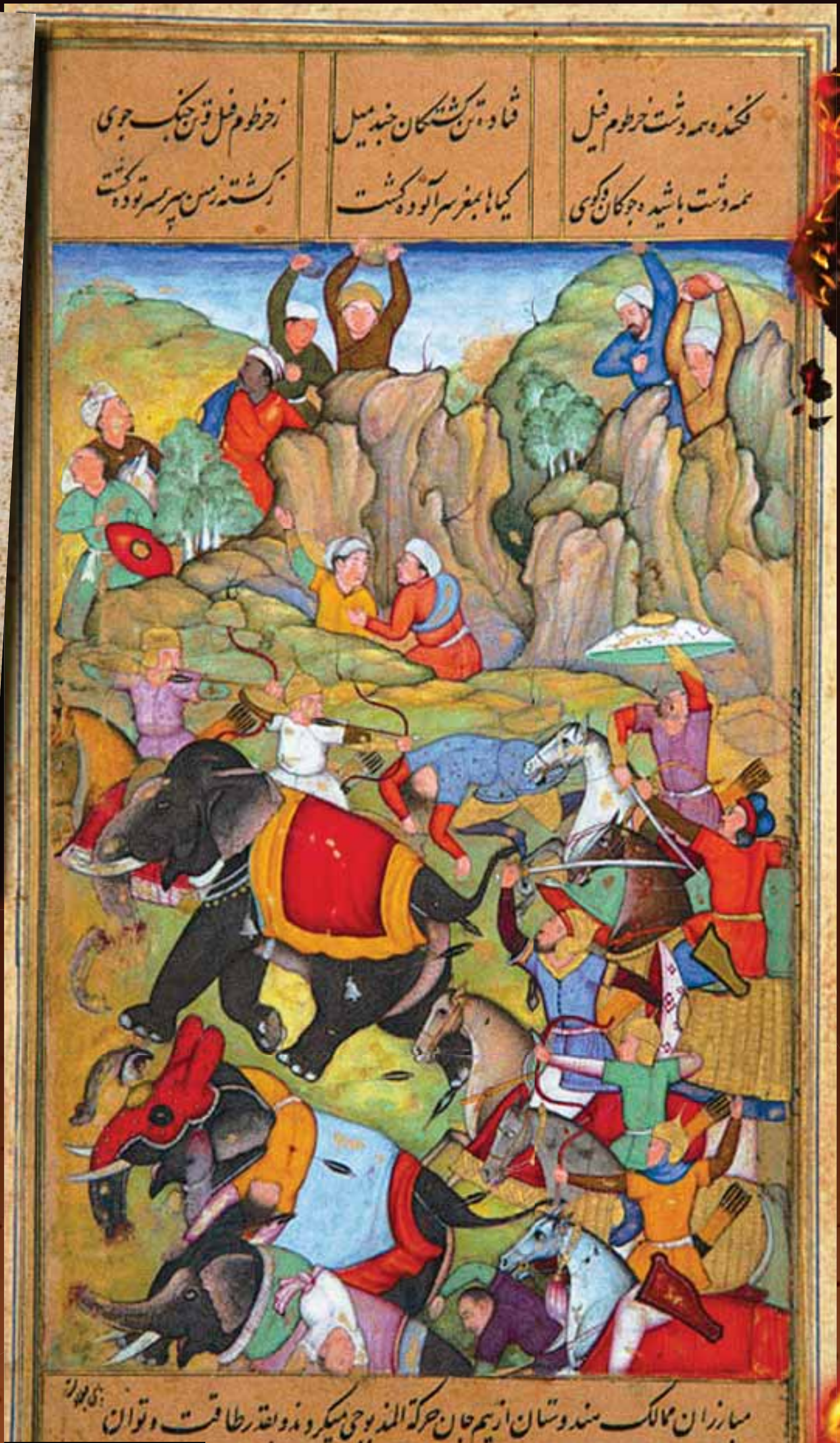
Soviet archaeologist Mikhail Gerasimov was next to try his luck. As Uzbekistan was then part of the USSR, he travelled to Samarkand in 1941 to conduct experiments on Timur's remains. In the dead of night on 21 June 1941, he removed Timur's skeleton from its place. As the sun rose the next morning, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, his large-scale invasion of the USSR. Was this just a coincidence, or was the ruthless Timur causing yet more misery from beyond the grave?


Timur's grave marker (the dark, jade sarcophagus in the centre) was once stolen by a Persian invader

Images: Getty Images (architects, grave marker); shakko CC BY-SA 3.0 (Timur reconstruction photo)



Timur wrote this letter (in Persian) to the French King Charles VI in 1402, asking him to send merchants to Samarkand



مبارزان ممالک هندوستان از بیم جان حرکة المذبوحی میکردند و بقدر طاقت و توان

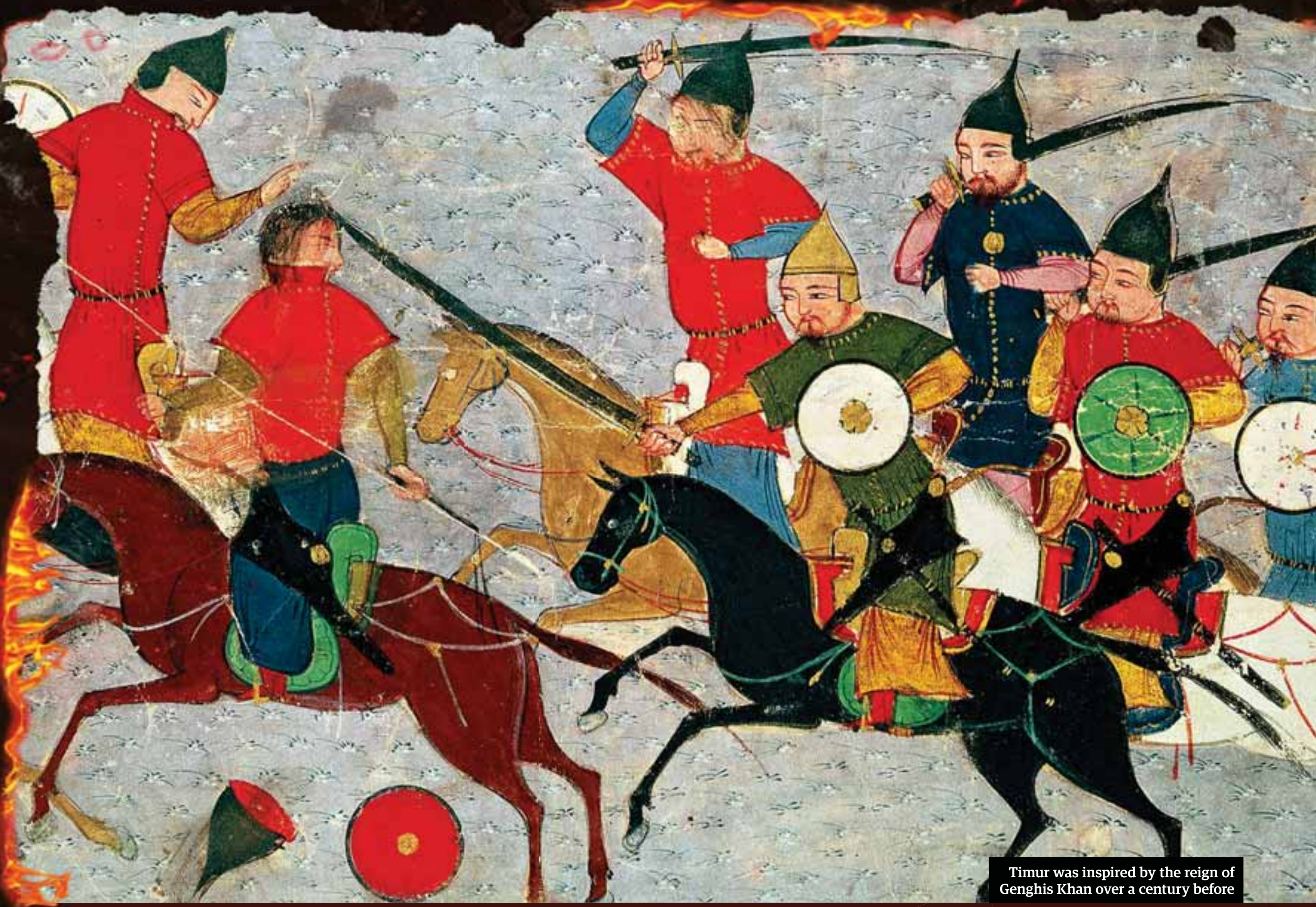
Timur defeats the Delhi Sultanate in this illustration from the 1590s

> "It was time for him to take matters into his own hands"

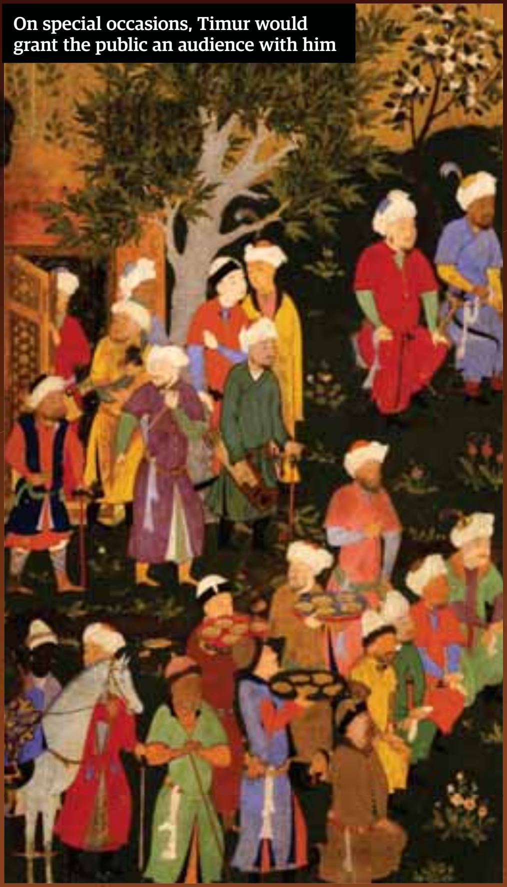
the scimitars and battle-axes of my firm and invincible Janissaries?" So, an enraged Timur set out to test the Ottoman elite guard's invincibility. On his way to Constantinople, Timur reconquered Azerbaijan and Syria before inflicting yet more brutality, this time on beleaguered Baghdad. Up to 20,000 of its citizens were killed and its monuments destroyed. After all, these ancient cities could not possibly be allowed to stand as rivals to Samarkand.

When he finally reached Turkey, Timur reportedly promised not to shed blood if the town of Sivas surrendered. Trusting his word, they did. It's said he had 3,000 of the townspeople buried alive. Timur maintained that he had kept his promise. After all, there was no blood.

Near Ankara, Bayezid met Timur's army on 20 July 1402 for a dramatic showdown. Timur was



Timur was inspired by the reign of Genghis Khan over a century before



On special occasions, Timur would grant the public an audience with him

"Timur evidently placed great significance on these feasts, as one guest was punished for turning up late by having his nose pierced like a pig"

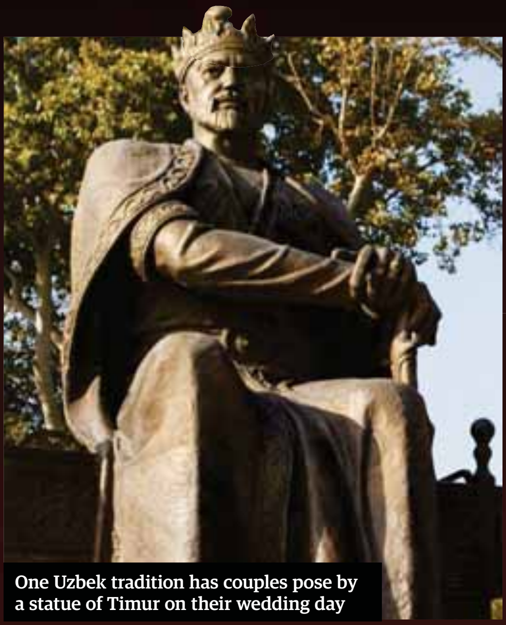
a shrewd tactician, so he circumvented Bayezid and attacked his army from behind. After a short battle, the sultan was captured and dragged back to Samarkand kicking and screaming. There, he was allegedly subjected to a variety of imaginative humiliations, from Timur using him as a footstool to being put on display in a golden cage.

Amazingly, some rulers in Western Europe supported Timur. They thought he was helping them to achieve Christian goals by keeping the Ottomans – a powerful Islamic empire right on their doorstep with a beady eye on Hungary – at bay. Upon learning of his victory at Ankara, England's Henry IV and Charles VI of France sent messages declaring their congratulations to Timur. The Spanish kingdom of Castile went even further and dispatched an envoy, led by Ruy González de Clavijo, to Samarkand.

Clavijo described in fantastical detail the wondrous and exotic goings-on he saw at Timur's court. Arriving in 1404, he described Timur's 15 palaces, which blended nomadic and Islamic traditions. Some of them were essentially grand tents that could be packed up and moved when necessary. Treated as honoured guests, the Spaniards dined each night at lavish feasts, which were always preceded by bouts of heavy drinking – apparently following Mongol tradition. Timur evidently placed great significance on these feasts, as one guest was punished for turning up late by having his nose pierced like a pig.

Just after Clavijo and his crew started on their long journey back to Madrid in November 1404, Timur set off for what would turn out to be his last hurrah. Samarkand had been trading with Ming China for a long time, but Timur had grown tired of being treated like a vassal. For example, when a message from China arrived in 1395 calling the Ming emperor "lord of the realms of the face of the earth", and treating Timur like an inferior, he decided to detain the Chinese messengers. When China dispatched more envoys to find out

Images: Getty Images (Inspired by Genghis Khan, audience, Uzbek tradition); Alamy (The Crossroad of Cultures x3)



One Uzbek tradition has couples pose by a statue of Timur on their wedding day

what had happened to them, Timur supposedly imprisoned the second batch as well.

Timur's plan was to overthrow the Ming and replace them with the Yuan dynasty, a system of Mongol rule established by Kublai Khan. While he normally embarked on his expeditions in the spring, in order to take advantage of good weather, he bucked his own trend and departed Samarkand in December 1404 with an army of approximately 200,000 troops. His chief astrologers had told him that the stars were in favourable alignment. What could go wrong?

Unfortunately for Timur, the stars turned out to be more favourable for China than they were for him. He fell ill on the frosty banks of the Syr Darya River in Uzbekistan and died – possibly of cold – in February 1405. With no leader to inspire a victory, Timur's army decided to turn around and head back home. The fearsome conqueror was embalmed in fragrant oils and placed in an elaborate ivory coffin for the journey to his final resting place, the beautiful Gūr-e-Amir in Samarkand, his treasured city.

Like Genghis Khan, Timur had divided his territory between his male descendants, but ultimately his empire was built on fear, terror and pillaging rather than good governance. Timur's successors would spend the next few decades fighting each other over the land, and eventually his vast empire would crumble.

However, the legacy of the 'Sword of Islam' continues to this day. His double-great-grandson Babur founded the iconic Mughal dynasty of India, a ruling family responsible for creating stunning, Timurid-inspired monuments like the Taj Mahal and Delhi's Red Fort. While Timur was thoroughly deserving of his bloodthirsty reputation, he left a unique visual impression on the city of Samarkand and transformed the area from a neglected desert outpost to a centre for cultural, intellectual and religious exchange for generations to come. Not bad for a man who began his career as a lame sheep bandit.

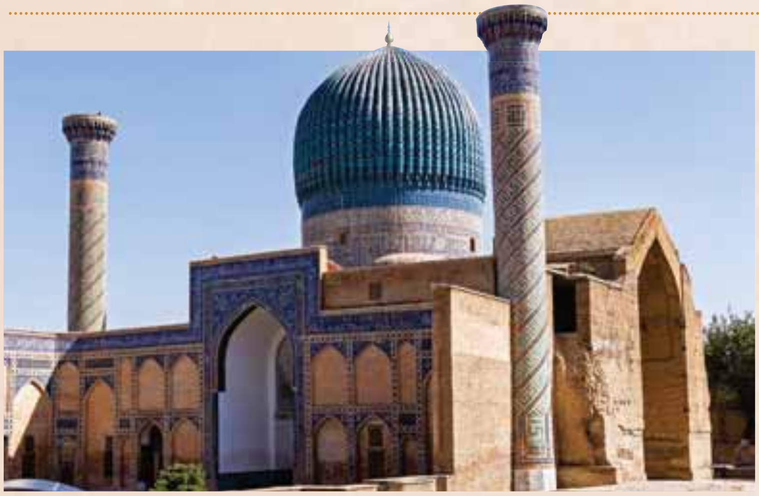
The Crossroad of Cultures

When he wasn't away on campaign or killing people in droves, Timur loved to construct great monuments to his power and wealth. While only a few structures still survive today, they give us a unique insight into the ruler's personality and ambition. Intending to make Samarkand a great capital, Timur envisioned a city returned to the glory days of the Silk Road, bustling with people from all parts of his empire.

However, his methods of achieving this goal were no different to the ways he conducted war. He forced people to come from territories he had conquered and treated his architects very badly indeed if they did not please him.

But Timur appears to have taken something of a carrot and stick approach to construction projects. According to Clavijo, he threw cooked meat and coins to builders working on the foundations to encourage them to work faster. However, if they didn't meet his unrealistic deadlines, it would be the end of them.

The result was a stunning, well-designed city that was filled with ornate public squares, madrassas, mosques, gardens and all manner of palaces. Even after Timur's death, the Samarkand region continues to be a place of great beauty, as his successors developed on the conqueror's original vision.

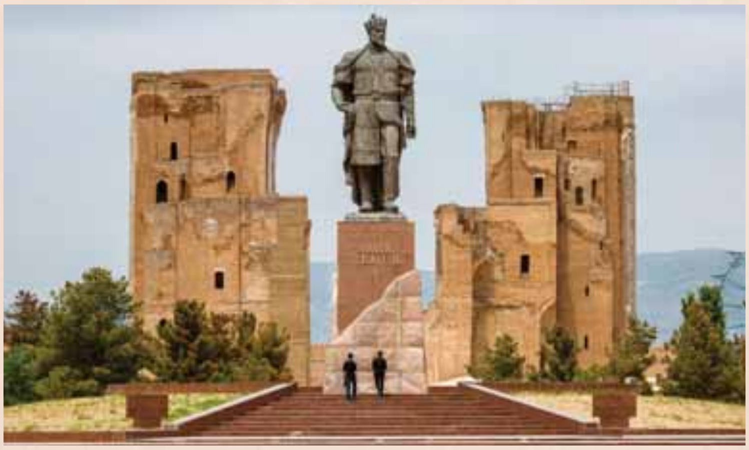


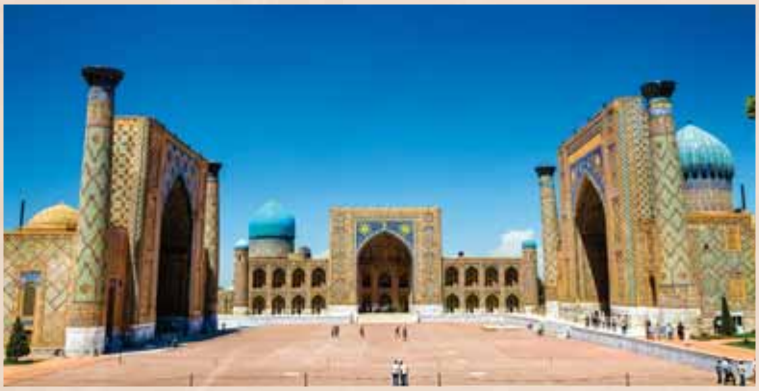
Gūr-e-Amir

Timur's tomb in Samarkand, the Gūr-e-Amir, is covered in elaborate blue tiling. Topped with a trademark dome, Timur's grave is marked with a stunning slab of jade, rumoured to be the largest ever found at the time.

Aq Saray Palace

After winning a resounding victory in the town of Shahrisabz, Timur commissioned an incredible white palace to stand on the site of his triumph. Once one of the largest of its kind, today only the ruined walls of the great hall survive.





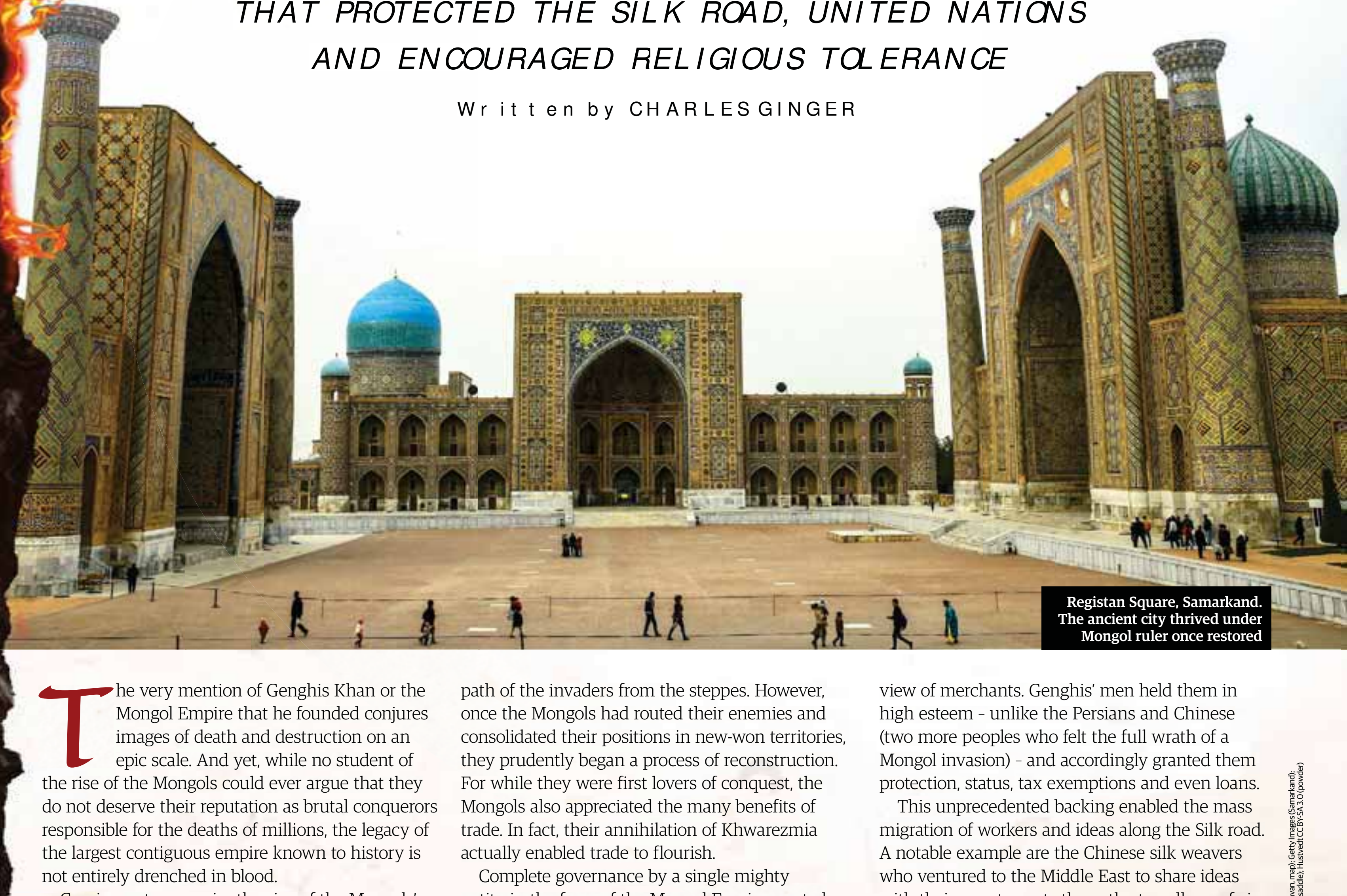
The Registan

The Registan was built soon after Timur's death and this public square bears his influence everywhere you look. On each side is a madrassa (a place of learning) adorned with incredibly lavish decorations influenced by other parts of the Timurid Empire.

LEGACY OF THE *Empire*

A REPUTATION FOR GREED AND CRUELTY HAS CLOUDED MODERN JUDGEMENTS OF AN EMPIRE THAT PROTECTED THE SILK ROAD, UNITED NATIONS AND ENCOURAGED RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Written by CHARLES GINGER



Registan Square, Samarkand. The ancient city thrived under Mongol ruler once restored

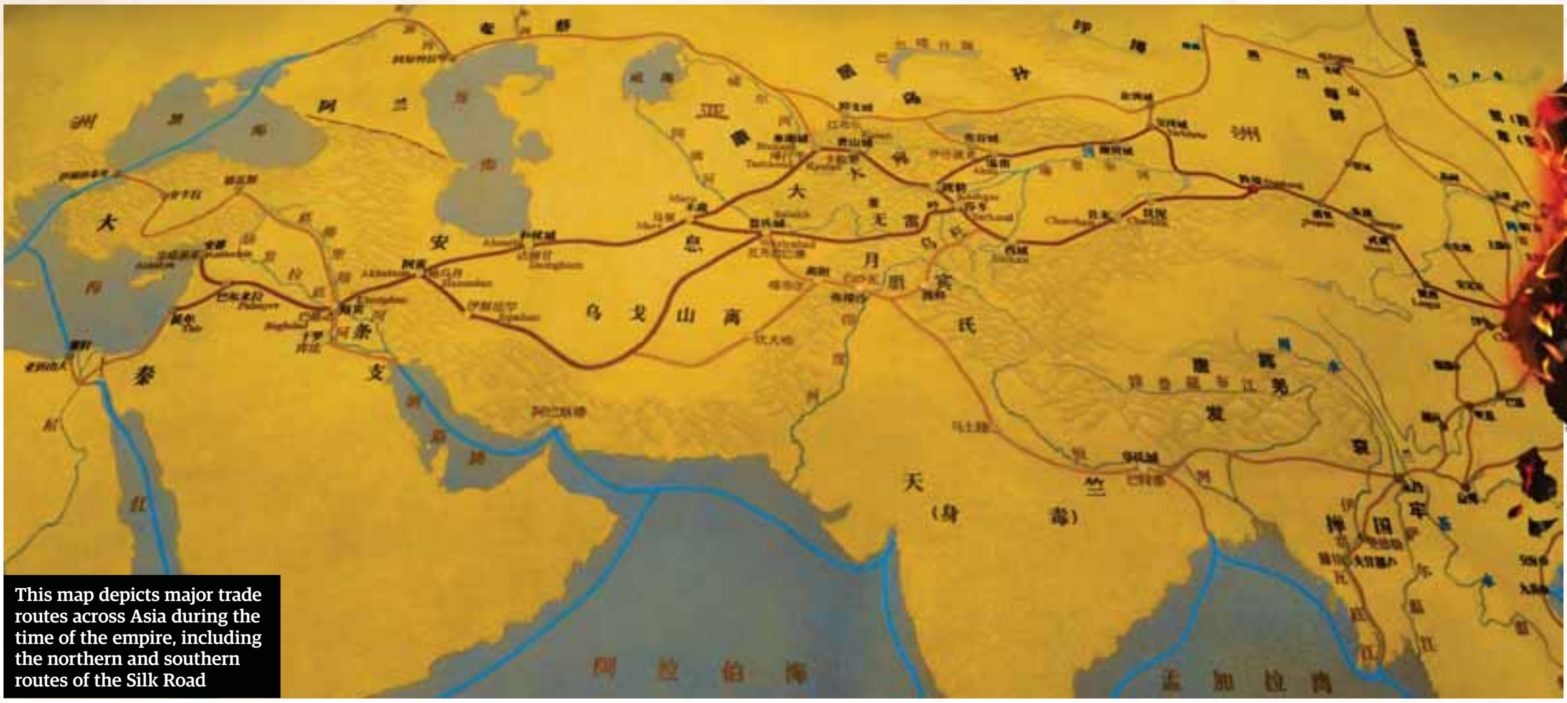
The very mention of Genghis Khan or the Mongol Empire that he founded conjures images of death and destruction on an epic scale. And yet, while no student of the rise of the Mongols could ever argue that they do not deserve their reputation as brutal conquerors responsible for the deaths of millions, the legacy of the largest contiguous empire known to history is not entirely drenched in blood.

Carving out an empire the size of the Mongols' inevitably resulted in large-scale warfare and the widespread destruction of numerous towns and cities unfortunate enough to find themselves in the path of the invaders from the steppes. However, once the Mongols had routed their enemies and consolidated their positions in new-won territories, they prudently began a process of reconstruction. For while they were first lovers of conquest, the Mongols also appreciated the many benefits of trade. In fact, their annihilation of Khwarezmia actually enabled trade to flourish.

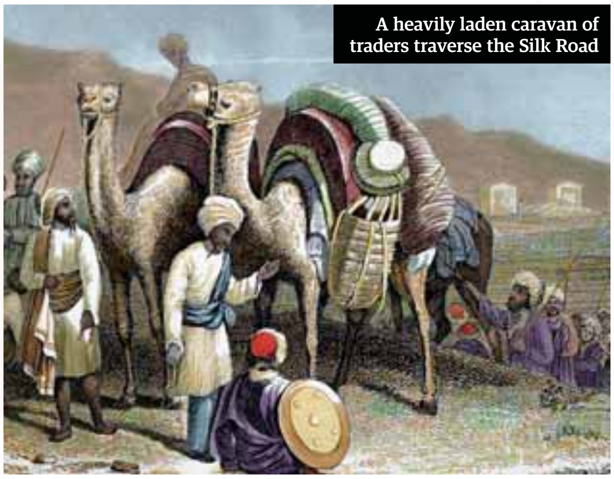
Complete governance by a single mighty entity in the form of the Mongol Empire created a stable environment in which merchants could freely travel. This ability to move and trade without fear was supplemented by the Mongol view of merchants. Genghis' men held them in high esteem – unlike the Persians and Chinese (two more peoples who felt the full wrath of a Mongol invasion) – and accordingly granted them protection, status, tax exemptions and even loans.

This unprecedented backing enabled the mass migration of workers and ideas along the Silk road. A notable example are the Chinese silk weavers who ventured to the Middle East to share ideas with their counterparts there, the travellers safe in the knowledge that the Mongols were erecting silk factories and rebuilding ruined cities in order to encourage and maintain trade.

Images: Alamy (caravan, map); Getty Images (Samarkand); Yaan CC BY-SA 3.0 (saddle); Hustvedt CC BY-SA 3.0 (powder)



This map depicts major trade routes across Asia during the time of the empire, including the northern and southern routes of the Silk Road



A heavily laden caravan of traders traverse the Silk Road

The invention of the stirrup revolutionised horse riding

Spices, tea, artworks and silk all flowed to the Western world along this crucial artery, passed in the other direction by gold, porcelain, astronomical studies and medial manuscripts bound for the east. Ideas and goods spread as never before, helped by the Mongol desire for both silk and cloth-of-gold.

With hubs such as Samarkand restored to their former glory by the Mongols, merchants and other tradesmen, including jewellers, stone workers and architects, could ply their trade in formerly unreachable markets. In turn, this led to many previously impoverished people discovering sources of income that greatly enhanced their standard of living.

Invented by the Chinese, gunpowder completely changed how wars were fought

This mingling of people and ideas saw traditions from both sides intertwining to create new forms of art, with the Iranian art scene enjoying a particularly spectacular boom under Mongol governorship. Inventions that were completely new to the Western world were also transported throughout the empire, from paper and a movable printing press to gunpowder, the triangular plow and the blast furnace, all Chinese inventions that were adopted by Western merchants.

The very concept of a Chinese nation can also be attributed to the Mongols, for it was their invasion that welded once disparate regions together in the furnace of war. The same applies to eastern and western Russia, among a number of other places. To this day many lands that the Mongols brought to heel remain intact. These remarkable achievements were only possible due to a prescient Mongol policy.

Largely unheard of at the time, the Mongol concept of religious tolerance helped to sooth the regions that they had previously ravaged, and by permitting worshippers of all faiths to openly practice their beliefs the Mongols not only avoided further bloodshed but also helped to stabilise areas that were vital for trade.

However, overseeing the steady flow of goods was not the Mongols' only contribution. They developed a writing system and alphabet that is still in use to this day, and Kublai Khan spread the use of paper money during his successful reign. Other Mongol creations include the stirrup, which revolutionised horse riding, and dried milk, a commodity now consumed the world over.

Of a more martial nature was the lethal composite bow, a powerful weapon crafted by the Mongols and used to devastating effect on many battlefields. To compliment their bows the Mongols shaped a variety of arrows, one of which was a hollowed missile that whistled as it flew. The Mongol army also has the distinction of being the first to build and use hand grenades.

While many of these inventions wrought death and misery, a number of them marked huge strides in mankind's progress. Had the Mongols not built a safe haven in which ideas and goods could flow, and had they not been able to spread their own creations, the world of today would be a rather different place.

For all the skulls they piled up and the walls they tore down, it is wrong to simply label the Mongols as ruthless killers and rapacious plunderers, and thereby discount their numerous positive contributions. Without them, many societies would have remained ignorant of life-changing ideas.

NEW
STORY OF THE
BATTLE of BRITAIN
THE ROYAL NAVY
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW SIR MAX HASTINGS
BRITAIN'S BRAVE FOREIGN FIGHTERS
WAAF • INSIDE THE LUFTWAFFE • THE COST OF DEFEAT

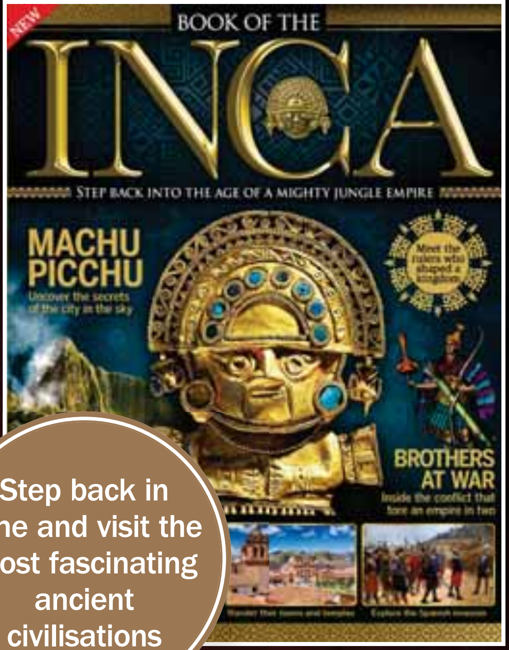
Examine world wars and epic battles through maps and rare documents

ANGLO-SAXONS

ANNE BOLEYN
SIX WIVES

NEW
STALIN
HITLER STALIN

BOOK OF
Death


NEW
BOOK OF THE
INCA
STEP BACK INTO THE AGE OF A MIGHTY JUNGLE EMPIRE
MACHU PICCHU
Uncover the secrets of the city in the sky
BROTHERS AT WAR
Inside the conflict that tore an empire in two

Step back in time and visit the most fascinating ancient civilisations

HISTORY'S GREATEST MYSTERIES

ANCIENT GODS

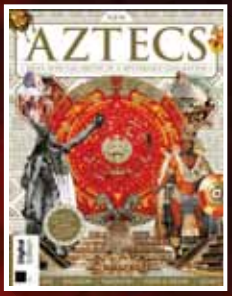
HEROES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

NEW
SALEM
WITCH TRIALS

NEW
INSIDE THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR
BOOK OF THE
SAMURAI
THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF THE ICONIC JAPANESE FIGHTERS
WARLORDS THE EMPIRE
RŌNIN: WANDERING SWORDSMEN

Explore iconic fighters, cultural traditions, top tactics and weapons

EVERYTHING
THE MIDDLE AGES
DARK AGES
HEROES & HOARDS
AGE OF CHIVALRY



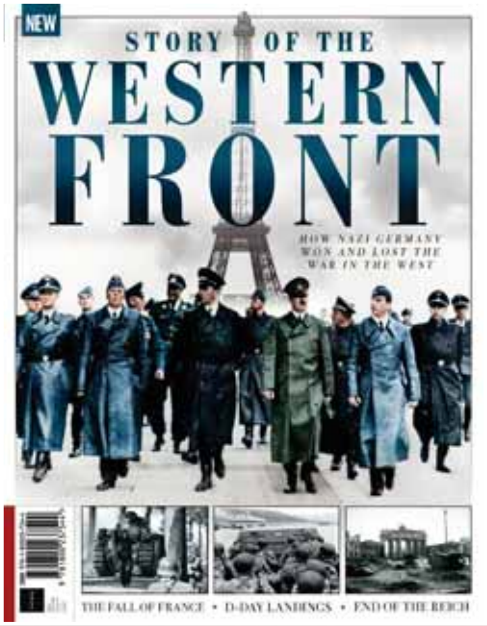
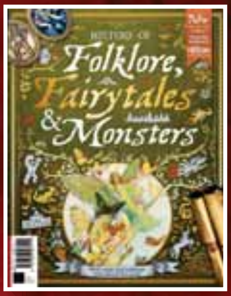
NEW
HISTORY
TUDORS

HERETICS HOLY WARS

✓ Get great savings when you buy direct from us

✓ 1000s of great titles, many not available anywhere else

✓ World-wide delivery and super-safe ordering

HISTORY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

NEW
STORY OF THE WESTERN FRONT
HOW NAZI GERMANY WON AND LOST THE WAR IN THE WEST
THE FALL OF FRANCE • D-DAY LANDINGS • END OF THE REICH

HISTORY OF Folklore, Fairytales & Monsters

HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA

GREATEST WARRIORS

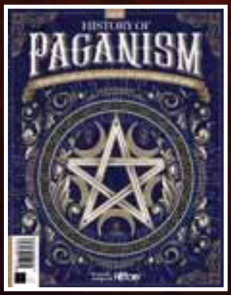
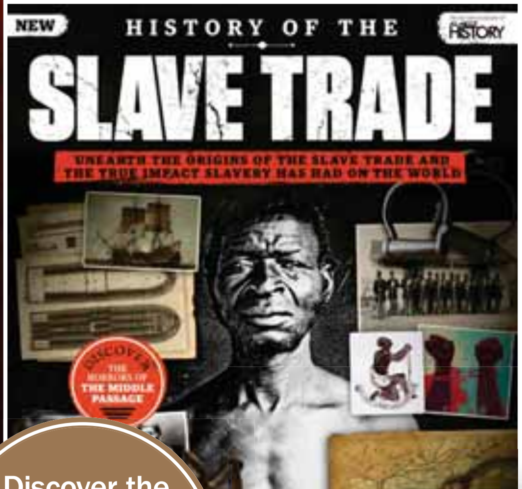
NEW
HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

NEW
What if... Alternative History

STEP BACK IN TIME WITH OUR HISTORY TITLES

Immerse yourself in a world of emperors, pioneers, conquerors and legends and discover the events that shaped humankind

NEW
HISTORY GHOSTS

HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

HISTORY OF PAGANISM

NEW
HISTORY OF THE SLAVE TRADE
UNEARTH THE ORIGINS OF THE SLAVE TRADE AND THE TRUE IMPACT SLAVERY HAS HAD ON THE WORLD
DISCOVER THE HORRORS OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

HISTORY OF MONSTERS & MYTHICAL BEASTS

ELITE FORCES

BOOK OF SPELLS

Discover the truth behind history's most shameful chapters

futurebookazines

Follow us on Instagram @futurebookazines

FUTURE

www.magazinesdirect.com

Magazines, back issues & bookazines.

THE EMPIRE
by numbers

110 million

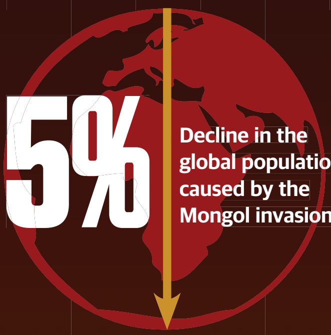
Population of the empire at its largest

23 million km²

Size of the empire at its peak

40 million

People killed by the Mongols



5%

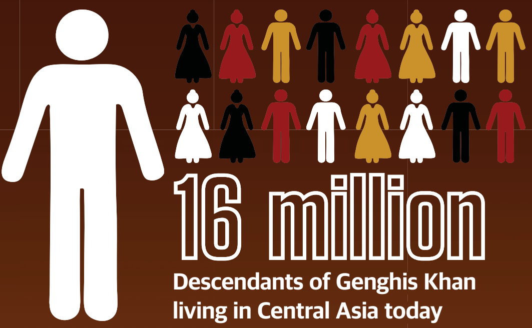
Decline in the global population caused by the Mongol invasions

16

Age of Genghis Khan when he first married

65

Pitched battles won by Subutai



16 million

Descendants of Genghis Khan living in Central Asia today

3

Age at which Mongol children began to ride horses

750ft

Range of the Mongols' favoured composite bow

90,000

Size of Mongol army that invaded China

700 MILLION TONS

Amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere by Mongol invasions as forests returned to previously inhabited/farmed areas

Images: Getty Images (trees, child on horse, small archers); Rebekka Hearl (big archer)

Image: Alamy

Genghis Khan
AND THE
MONGOL EMPIRE

UNEARTH THE ORIGINS OF THE SLAVE WHO FORGED AN EMPIRE

The early life of
GENGHIS KHAN

Chart the rise of Genghis, from slave to universal master

Conquering
CHINA

Explore the Mongol conquests of China, Europe and the Middle East

BATTLE OF AIN JALUT

Mongol Empire

10,000-12,000

Mamluk Sultanate

15,000-20,000

Study the brutal battles that ruined nations and shaped a dynasty

元朝

Meet the rebels who dared to stand against the Mongol tide

"He would come to hold in his hands the fates of millions. In time the world would shake before him"

WOMEN OF THE EMPIRE ✦ CULTURE & COOKING ✦ RED TURBAN REBELLION

BOOKAZINE

9021

9000